



WHITBY OLD WESLEY CHAPEL,

OPENED BY J. WESLEY 1788.

THE
RISE OF METHODISM
BRIEFLY SKETCHED.

BY

ROBERT TATE GASKIN.

"If you ask me on what principle I acted, it was this—a desire to be a Christian; and a conviction that whatever I judge conducive thereto that I am bound to do; wherever I can best answer this end, there it is my duty to go."

John Wesley.

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The substance of the following little work was given as a lecture before the Whitby Wesleyan Young Men's Association ; a society which, under the presidency of the Rev. W. H. Bambridge, was of great service to its members. The favour with which the paper was then ; and on a subsequent occasion ; received, and the apparent want of a small book on the subject, have induced its revision, enlargement, and publication.

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The Rise of Methodism.

To rightly estimate the life of an individual who has been famous, it is necessary to consider the state of the times in which he lived, and to have regard to the powers which were armed against him ; for the qualities of a man may in some measure be known by the opposition he overcomes. We cannot be altogether independent of what takes place around us. It was the boast of one illustrious character that he made circumstances. And so do we all ; but still to begin with we must take things as we find them. In the case referred to—that of Napoleon—as far as we know, war made his fortune ; and the cause of his glory must be sought far back in the previous ages, when tyranny was producing the French Revolution. Martin Luther found the plot of his life's drama in the corruptions of the Romish Church. John Wesley might have lived and died an earnest, yet unnoticed clergyman, but for the vices of English society.

The history of England during the reigns of the first and second Georges is not a pleasant one to a religious or a patriotic Englishman. For, while there were noble deeds by flood and field, and the

might of England was felt here and there as it had been before and as it has often been since, and while science and literature had a few of their “bright, particular stars,” the annals of that period record for the most part the story of unnecessary wars unskilfully conducted ; of the weaknesses of monarchs whose “predominant and habitual passions were for mistresses, punch, and money;” of parliamentary corruption and ministerial intrigues ; of almost universal licentiousness in the aristocracy and of spiritual wickedness in high places ; of immoral writings and popular infidelity ; of ignorance, brutality, and crime amongst the people. The resolutions of Government seemed to be that so long as the people were not Papist they might be Infidel—so long as they were not Jacobin they might be wicked.

In those days no gentleman need show his face in public who durst not fight for his position ; and it was a glory to have had an “affair of honour.” So deeply was this mixed with the spirit of the times that you may read of a religiously-disposed man making his will before fighting a duel, recommending his soul to God and asking forgiveness for the meditated crime from which he had neither grace nor nerve to refrain.

Gambling and card-playing prevailed to an enormous extent, and were not confined to the male sex. They were the rage amongst fashionable women. So perseveringly did they give themselves up to them that it was said that children were then

born with the five of clubs impressed upon them. Such a custom could not fail to induce domestic misery and looseness of morals.

The state of the army and navy was deplorable. Mr. Wesley was at Newcastle during the rebellion of 1745, and was struck with the drinking and cursing of the soldiery, and reflected that it was scarcely possible that God should bless the arms of such men. Ten years after, we find in a letter addressed to Pitt, it is hoped some method may be taken, by discouraging national sins, to gain the favour of the Lord of Hosts. It is said they could not hope that God would bless the counsels of those who are avowedly despisers of his laws and live in open contempt of religion, and who spend that time in gaming which should be devoted to the worship of God. Nor could they expect that God would go forth with our fleets and armies while the regiments were filled with profaneness in men and officers, and every man-of-war was a little hell of impiety. And he is earnestly intreated to abolish the custom of selling chaplaincies of regiments to wealthy clergymen, who entirely neglect their duties.

Now and then, under some extraordinary event, the people became alarmed. There was a striking instance of this in the year 1750. In February, several violent tremblings of the earth took place in London and the surrounding neighbourhood. Chimnies were overturned, the brasses and pewter fell from the shelves, and the people were greatly terrified. But when, just a month after, other and

more severe shocks were felt, the terror became general. To add to the universal dismay, a crazy life-guardsman predicted that a much more terrible earthquake than the two former ones would take place in four weeks, and the city was thrown into the utmost confusion. As the day approached, great numbers fled, and others sat up awaiting with fear and trembling the fatal hour. The Westminster end of the city was crowded with coaches and people fleeing. Many removed their goods. London was like a sacked city. A lady just stepping into her carriage to escape dropped down dead through fear. The chapels and churches were crowded, and Mr. Whitfield preached in Hyde Park at midnight. On this occasion, the Bishop of London addressed a letter to the clergy and people of Westminster, in which his lordship lamented the general depravity of the times. The horrid oaths and blasphemies, and the detestable lewdness, impiety, luxury, and love of pleasure then prevalent. He called on parents and masters to take care of those committed to their keeping, and to do all in their power to avert the just judgments of God, so that they might peradventure leave the next generation better than theirs—"for," said his lordship, "the dissolute wickedness of the age is a more dreadful sign and prognostication of divine anger than are the tremblings of the earth under us."

These warnings were soon forgotten, and five years afterwards Romaine said, "The love of pleasure is the characteristic of this age. It is seen

in nothing so much as the madness with which men are running at this time after public diversions. The playhouses are crowded. The opera house is full of the politest company. Balls and concerts increase every day. The effects of carding and gaming are felt everywhere. The spirit of pleasure has gone forth and seized all orders of men from the highest to the lowest." And what was the nature of these plays they were so anxious to see? They were often of the most immoral tendency. The language was coarse. The allusions were licentious. The plot was not seldom base. One wonders how decent people could listen to such infamous productions.

"Vauxhall," says a writer in *Household Words* "from the time of Queen Anne to an advanced period of the reign of Geo. III. was a fashionable seat of infamy. The lessee, in 1761, made an attempt to check the wickedness that made it scandalous, if not unsafe, for any decent woman to enter the gardens. He closed the secluded walks and lit up the recesses; but the young gentlemen of fashion resenting this invasion of their privileges tore down the barriers, and put out the new lights. At Almack's, people of quality assembled for high play. At Soho-square, Mrs. Cornleys kept a house of questionable reputation. Masquerades and operas, approached by guinea tickets, were the ostensible amusements—assignations the real business of the establishment. Worst of all was an assembly called the Coterie, a mixed club of the

most fashionable ladies and gentlemen, the ladies balloting for the gentlemen, and the gentlemen for the ladies."

Decay commenced at the top of the tree. The examples of the rich were not lost on the people. It seemed as if the great Magician of Evil had stretched forth his poisonous wand, and transformed them into eager candidates for office below. They were ignorant and brutal ; they suffered, too, from impolitic commercial restrictions, were often driven to rioting by want, and were nearly always discontented. Earl Bathurst, speaking in the House of Lords on the Gin Bill (1744), said :—" The nation is sunk into the lowest state of corruption. The people are not only vicious but insolent beyond example—they not only break the laws but defy them." The punishments for crime were cruel and unequal. Death was the penalty alike for murder and for theft. Dr. Johnson said—

Scarce can our fields, such crowds at Tyburn die,
With hemp the gallows and the fleet supply.

Each month, amidst the uproar of obscene tongues, were executed at Tyburn four, six, eight, or even twenty poor wretches, in many instances condemned for stealing articles of a few shillings' value, while the scene closed with a battle between the friends of the deceased and the emissaries of doctors wanting bodies for dissection.

It will be seen that this was not the state of the country in one particular year and in one particular place merely. Nations are neither corrupted nor

purified in a day. It was the real, ascertained condition of the people, spreading into all its parts and extending over a lengthened period. In this state of affairs, what was the Legislature doing? Why, these were the days of notorious parliamentary corruption, when that man—unscrupulous, but of splendid genius—who said every man had his price—became all powerful in the House of Commons. Small hope from that source. What were the clergy doing? Some of them were mourning the sad state of their flocks, were praying with agonising zeal, and crying, “How long, O Lord, wilt thou bear with this sinful generation?” Many of them were doing their duty to the best of their ability, but utterly powerless in the work of national regeneration. There is no question about the Church being in a very degenerate state. The learned Butler felt this. On the decease of Potter, Archbishop of Canterbury, George II. offered to make Butler his successor, but he declined, saying that “he was too late to save a sinking Church.”

John Foster relates upon what he considers good authority an instance of a country clergyman who, one Sunday morning, made the service as short as he could, and announced as his reason that a neighbour was going to bait his bull in the afternoon, and he had hastened the service to its conclusion in order that the congregation might have more time to see the sport. This case must have been an exception; but those ministers who, as the world thought, did all that was necessary, preached a cold

and spiritless formality. "They found," said Dr. Waddy recently, "the land pervaded with immorality, and they preached morality."

It is therefore evident that as the nation had fallen into extraordinary wickedness—the governors and clergy of the nation being very remiss in their duty—there was needed something to reform the people. Something was needed—something was provided—and while statesmen were bribing, and judges were condemning, and clergymen were dozing, there was raised up a band of men who, by the grace of God, did more for the public good than hangman or vicar.

The movement commenced at Oxford University. A few young men joined themselves together for mutual assistance and for united prayer. They agreed to deny themselves all superfluities, and to devote their leisure to visiting those who were sick and in prison, to feeding the poor and needy, and while their fellow-students were holding ungodly revels to meet frequently for religious worship. But this conduct did not meet with the approval it deserved. That university, the chief seat of learning in the empire, whence issued each year numbers of men destined to be teachers of the people, was tainted with vice and infidelity; and the young reformers were scoffed at by those who should have assisted them. **METHODISTS** they were called, because they did good by system. The **Holy Club**, **Sabbatarians**, and similar names were bestowed upon them—names significant and honourable to

God-fearing persons, but ludicrous in the extreme to that immoral age.

Three of these young men became very famous in the religious history of this country. Before going to college they had been trained in different atmospheres. The Wesleys were sons of a pious clergyman, and a not less pious mother. Mrs. Wesley was just such a woman as you would expect to influence her family favourably. Her household was conducted by strict rule. In infancy the children were taught good manners. She had an abhorrence of "that most odious noise, the crying of children." So they were taught to obey, and "cry softly." She condemned the way of over-indulgent parents, who spare the rod and spoil the child. Not that she was in any way severe—that was unnecessary—but she believed that by commencing when intelligence was in the bud, she might join with the earliest lessons of their youth the affectionate corrections of natural waywardness. "I insist," said she, "upon conquering the will of children betimes, because this is the only strong and rational foundation of a religious education, without which both precept and example will be ineffective." Under such tuition the Wesleys passed their boyhood—the only great events of these years being a noisy ghost and a fire, from which John barely escaped with his life. Whitfield was a publican's son. He, also, had a good mother. The Wesleys were always religiously inclined. Whitfield at one time could both curse and swear. He had a roguish

custom of picking his mother's pocket, and card-playing and romance reading were his heart's delight. Yet the Spirit of God moved early on his soul. "He loved theright, while he the wrong pursued;" and by a strange mixture of motives he gave to the poor part of the money he stole from his parent; and amongst the books purloined were some of devotion. But, however much they differed in early youth, the time came when, being ordained to the ministry, they went forth on a nobler crusade than ever steel-clad knight engaged in—a crusade which regarded all the earth as Holy Land, consecrated by their Redeemer's blood, but now, alas! in possession of the Prince of Darkness.

Urged by "strong benevolence of soul," the patriotic Oglethorpe had founded a colony in America, and named it Georgia after the King. It was a refuge for the distressed; and, amongst others, persecuted Protestants, driven from their German homes, were invited to settle. The Wesleys left England in the year 1735 for this place. Charles went as Oglethorpe's secretary, and John under the auspices of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. Charles came to England in 1736 with despatches, intending to return, but was prevented by sickness. John remained till 1738, and then came home also. On their passage to America the Wesleys made the acquaintance of a band of Moravians, who were seeking a new home in a free land. Struck by their demeanour, Wesley paid particular attention to them. He saw they

were meek and cheerful, doing all they could to assist their fellow-voyagers. "If they were pushed, struck, or thrown down, they rose again and went away; but no complaint was found in their mouth. There was now an opportunity of trying whether they were delivered from the spirit of fear, as well as from that of pride, anger, and revenge. In the midst of the Psalm wherewith their service began, the sea broke over, split the mainsail in pieces, covered the ship, and poured in between the decks as if the great deep had already swallowed us up. A terrible screaming began among the English. The Germans calmly sung on. I asked one of them afterwards, 'Were you not afraid?' He answered, 'I thank God, no.' 'But were not your women and children afraid?' He mildly replied, 'No! our women and children are not afraid to die.' "

It was therefore with very friendly sentiments that on his return to England in 1738, John Wesley met three of the United Brethren, just landed from Germany. With one of them in particular, Peter Boehler, he had much conversation. But although he respected, he did not quite understand them. They made light of the good works on which he was basing his hopes of heaven, or only gave them a secondary importance. He could not comprehend their faith, their knowledge of sins forgiven, their peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. These were things seldom or never heard of. It is true Dr. Edwards had preached them for some time in America. Here in England they were almost entirely

forgotten. The clergy were as ignorant of the New Birth as Nicodemus. Mrs. Wesley, a learned and pious lady, had seldom heard of these doctrines; and Wesley himself was hard of belief. Yet he was an earnest seeker after the Truth; so he at once went to his Greek Testament, manfully resolving to abide by the "law and the testimony." After some days of doubt and prayer he received this blessing. "I had now," says he, "no objection to what Boehler said of the nature of faith, viz.: 'A sure test and confidence which a man hath in God; and, through the merits of Christ, his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God.' But I could not comprehend what he spoke of an instantaneous work. I could not understand how this faith should be given in a moment: how a man could at once be thus turned from darkness to light, from sin and misery to righteousness and joy in the Holy Ghost. I searched the Scriptures again, touching this very thing, particularly the Acts of the Apostles; but to my utter astonishment, found scarce any instance there of other than instantaneous conversions; scarce any so slow as that of St. Paul, who was three days in the pangs of the new birth. I had but one retreat left, viz., thus: I grant God wrought in the first ages of Christianity; but the times are changed. What reason have I to believe he works in the same manner now? But I was beat out of this retreat, too, by the concurring evidence of several living witnesses, who testified God had thus wrought in themselves. Here ended my disputing. I could

now only cry out, ‘Lord, help thou my unbelief.’”

About the same time, in the wilds of America, the Holy Spirit was leading another heart to the knowledge of this blessed truth. One in every place, and infallible in its teaching, it led David Brainerd through the same humility to the same Saviour. God had work for these two men—the heathenism of America was to be combatted by the one—the heathenism of England by the other.

Although, however, he had been convinced of the truth of the doctrines the Moravians had taught him, he could not yet feel that he was himself the subject of that new birth, of which he was so earnestly preaching. Whilst his brother Charles had refused to hear of it—had even left the room when he argued in favour of it—yet he was the first to experience that which John had been the first to believe. Taking up his abode with “a poor, ignorant mechanic, who knew nothing but Christ,” at his house, Charles found the peace which passeth all understanding. Seeking earnestly to be a partaker in this precious faith, Wesley went sorrowing all the day, believing it sincerely, and preaching it to others, till he almost forgot his own want of it in the ardour of his intreaties; yet not able to grasp the promise, and snap the bonds of nature and of sin. But on the 24th of May, 1738, the day of his second birth dawned. About five o’clock that morning, he was reading his constant companion, the Greek Testament, and drinking in the gracious words, “There are given unto us exceeding great

and precious promises, even that ye should be partakers of the Divine nature." That evening he was present at a religious society in Aldersgate-street. Some one was reading Luther's description of the change wrought by God in the heart, through faith. The Spirit, in his enlightening power, was there; and Wesley felt his "heart strangely warmed," and was enabled to believe that God had, for Christ's sake, pardoned all his sins—whereupon he began to pray with all his might, not for himself nor for his friends, but by the instinct of his new nature, for those who had despitefully used and persecuted him.

From that time they went up and down the country, moved by a never-flagging zeal to convert the people. The doctrines they taught were simple, and easily understood by the simple. They declared that salvation came by faith alone. Conversion, they said, was an instantaneous work—occurring the moment a sinner attains to a "sure trust and confidence that Christ died for his sins, that he loved him and gave himself for him, and that the moment a penitent believes this, God pardons and absolves him." This pardon is not the result of any of our good works. We do not receive it because we deserve it, but because it has been purchased for us; and we never could earn it by good living. Beyond this work of conversion they also taught a "Christian perfection"—a state of sanctification which is the work of the Holy Spirit, whereby we are enabled to live from moment to moment without

sinning against God. Sanctification always follows justification—never precedes it. It is a state of calm repose in God, which no temptations can ruffle—

All the struggle then is o'er,
And wars and fightings cease.

Never were doctrines more easily proved from the Sacred Writings, “and yet,” says John Foster, “they were received with as strong an impression of novelty, strangeness, and contrariety to anything hitherto heard of, as any of our voyagers and travellers have been by the barbarous tribes who had never before seen civilised men.”

It was, however, their mode of preaching, more than their doctrines, which caused the wonder. Their doctrines were old as the Scriptures, and they moreover, proved them from the Prayer Book as well as the Bible. But there was a mighty difference between their advocacy and that of the sleepy and careless ministers around them. They were the messengers of God, and must proclaim his pardon for sinners, and threaten his vengeance against sin. They spake as dying men to dying men. To sinners, their voice was like the cry of “Fire!” to one in bed—like “Rocks ahead!” to the storm-driven mariner. They did not preach because they were in love with their own voice—they dared not refrain. In every congregation they saw but two classes, the saved and the unsaved. Every sermon was the savour of life unto life, or of death unto death. They

could not wink at the wickedness of the wicked, nor could they prophecy smooth things to those against whom the wrath of God was revealed. Their hearts were full of love to God and pity for man, and out of the fulness of their hearts it was that they spake.

They were careless of form so long as the end of preaching were accomplished—the conversion of sinners.

Let others for the shape and colour fight,
Of garments short or long, or black or white.

They aimed at nothing but the saving of souls, and they aimed at nothing less. They had no desire to separate from the Church of England. They were amongst her sincerest friends. They believed that “they might be firm members thereof, and yet have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man.” They wished only to differ from others by their more regular attendance at public worship, and their greater diligence in religious duties; to be a band of people within the outward church, but having their anchor within the veil. This was their often-expressed opinion, and Charles Wesley, in a rythmical epistle to his brother John, says:—

When first sent forth to minister the Word
Say, did we preach ourselves or Christ the Lord ?
Was it our aim disciples to collect,
To raise a party, or to found a sect ?
No ! but to spread the power of Jesu's name,
Repair the walls of our Jerusalem,
Revive the piety of ancient days,
And fill the earth with our Redeemer's praise.

Wesley took every opportunity to prove this was the case. When, many years after he had commenced

his labours, there were some amongst them who advocated a separation, he discountenanced it. He said that leaving aside the legality of it—about which he had doubts—it was not expedient. It would be a contradiction to their repeated declarations in preaching, in print, and in private conversation; it would be a handle to those who were seeking cause against them, and would offend many of their sincerest friends. Some would refuse to hear them, and fall into the snares of the devil. Thousands would leave them. It would cause strife between those who separated and those who remained; and because he would be obliged to give a reason for the course taken, he would be engaged in argument and contention when he might be preaching the gospel. Further, he said, to form a New Church would require time and thought which might be more profitably employed. The design of God in raising them up had undoubtedly been to quicken the brethren. Their first message was to the lost sheep of the Church of England. It was the farthest thing in their thoughts to be the ring-leaders of any particular sect. They regarded themselves as messengers of God to those who were Christian in name, but heathen in heart and life. He also warned them against expressing ill-feeling towards the clergy, and recommended them to attend Church as often as possible. There are many proofs that these were not mere assertions, behind which they cloaked other designs. Some members were expelled their societies because they had renounced

the Church ; and this at a time when, had Wesley been anxious to form a sect, he would have encouraged rather than deprecated ill-feeling to other systems ; and when, by the “foolishness of preaching,” rebels were brought back to God, they were recommended to attend the Church of England rather than Dissenting Chapels.

How was it, then, that with such strong motives and stronger desires to remain in the Church, a virtual separation took place in Wesley’s lifetime ? An answer will be found in the following facts.

The evil spirit raised against the Methodists at Oxford followed them into their world-wide parish, and they had scarcely begun their labours when they were assailed with a storm of opposition from the pulpit and the press. Orthodox Churchmen, whose opinions were of the Dutch-garden sort, and who held all innovations in abomination, were horrified at these daring encroachments ; while those who neither feared God nor regarded religion, were equally offended by the plain speaking of the men who “ told all drunkards, whoremongers, and common swearers, that they were on the high road to hell.” Wesley arrived in London from America on the 3rd of February, 1738. The following Sunday he preached at St. John the Evangelist’s, and was told he must not preach there again. The Sunday after, he preached at St. Andrew’s, Holborn, and with the same result. Whitfield reached London from Georgia on the 8th of December, in the same year, and in ten days was denied admission to five

pulpits. In the *Gentleman's Magazine* for May, 1739, we read: "Mr. Whitfield not being admitted to one pulpit in city or suburbs continued his preachments at Moorfields and Kennington Common to vast numbers of people. On Monday, the 21st, he made an excursion to Hertford, and thence to Bedford, Onley, Northampton, Hitchin, and St. Alban's; and, being denied the pulpits, preached at Northampton from the Weighing Chair on the Horse Course, elsewhere in the fields, and having sown the seeds of Methodism throughout his progress, returned the following Saturday evening to Kennington Common." Charles Wesley, on the representation of the Churchwardens, was dismissed from his curacy. One complaint against them was that, when they preached, the churches were so crowded that the regular congregations could not sit comfortably. "And yet," said Romaine, "these very persons who would not go to a play unless they knew there would be a full house, are very angry at a full church. Nay, so very angry that they will not come to Church if it be full; nay, so exceedingly angry that I know some of them who think the minister should be starved, and they will do what they can to starve him who happens to have a crowded congregation."

A great offence was their enthusiasm. It seemed a thing incredible that sane men should be excited about their immortal welfare. What is there in the salvation of sinners that should cause men to shout for joy, and make the welkin ring with their enfran-

chised tongues? So instead of rejoicing, Priests and Bishops overlooked the good results, and vindictively displayed every trifling defect found following so great a movement. Dr. Trapp preached four sermons at Christ Church, on the "nature, folly, and sin of being righteous overmuch," which were published at the earnest request of the audiences. He exclaimed greatly against a religion of "extraordinaries" and of "new inventions." He denounced the Methodists, and charged them with doing infinite mischief to religion and to the souls of men. Dr. Stebbing, in a sermon against religious delusion, charged them with disturbing the public peace; with setting at naught all rule and authority; and with intruding on other men's labours. And a certain Rev. Mr. Tucker "thought it his duty as a clergyman and a Christian, to prevent, as far as was in his power, the spreading of such dangerous principles, which struck at the root of all religion, and made it the jest of those who sat in the seat of the scorner."

The Bishop of London, in a charge to the clergy of his diocese, accused the Methodists with shamefully disturbing the parochial clergy, and using very unwarrantable methods to seduce their flocks from them, with drawing over to themselves the lowest and most ignorant of the people, and with spreading doctrines big with pernicious influences upon practice. One of the most popular writers against them was Dr. Lavington, Bishop of Exeter. He wrote a book, entitled "Enthusiasm of Methodists

and Papists compared," in which he made the Romish Church the standard of evil, and whatever agreed, or bore any similarity to it, deserving of condemnation. At this time, the Catholics had leanings towards the exiled Stuarts, and they were placed under considerable restrictions. There was consequently something very ungenerous in attempting to bring the Methodists into disrepute by allying them with the Catholics. With a license unworthy a Christian, and far beneath the dignity of his position, he made the most extreme and preposterous comparisons between the Methodists and the old Popish Saints. Mr. Wesley had said, that "as to gold, I count it dung and dross—I trample it under my feet—I esteem it as mire in the streets." Certainly, Wesley might say that; but the Bishop compares him to St. Phil. Neri, who loved poverty so much that he often prayed God would reduce him so that he should not have a penny, nor be able to find any person willing to give him one. Wesley speaks about Christian perfection, so the Bishop found a fit parallel in St. Francis, who was so perfectly above all earthly feelings that he used occasionally to appear in the streets stark naked, without being ashamed. Wesley speaks rapturously of some happy seasons when God was peculiarly present,—his lordship therefore places him alongside St. Gertrude, who fell in love with Jesus Christ, and died in an amorous fit. Once, when unwell, Wesley, in the fervour of his preaching, had forgotten his pain. He is therefore

compared to, or rather contrasted with, St. Rosa, who, being ill with a sore throat, Jesus Christ, her spouse, came to visit her, and invited her to play with him to divert her pain. She insisted that the winning should be whatever the winner chose. The cards were played, and she won the first game. She at once demanded the cure of her throat, and it was so immediately. Unfortunately for her, she lost the next game, and the pain in her throat returned.

They were the subjects of constant conversation. "I pray God," said one man, "these Methodists may never get the upper hand. If they do, we shall have dreadful work. What do you think they will do?" "Do," was the reply, "why they will murder us all. Do they not damn all mankind but themselves? and if they damn us they will murder us too, you may be sure!"

The silliest reports were circulated. Wesley was said to be a Papist in disguise, who, under the cloak of his religion, was advocating the cause of the Pretender. At one place, a rumour was widely spread that he had hanged himself, and had been cut down just in time to save his life. Plays were acted in theatres showing them in a most despicable light. The result was natural. The mobs, encouraged by priests and magistrates, did not scruple to maltreat these devoted servants of God. Cowardice is generally brutal. The people who allowed a handful of Scotch rebels to march into the heart of England, and neither had courage to join them nor oppose them found a worthy occupa-

tion in abusing a few peaceful men, whose labours were all directed to their welfare. It would be doing them injustice to say they did so on their own premeditation alone. Few mobs have the stamina to carry on a course of annoyance, and insult the eye of heaven with such deeds, unless winked at by their superiors in society. But they were willing instruments in the hands of their inciters. It was but a change of sport. It added an agreeable variety to bull-baiting and cockfighting. Had the combativeness been exercised against foreign enemies that was against Wesley and his friends it would have been better for the country. But, as he remarks, the war against Methodists was carried on with far more vigour than that against the Spaniard.

Wherever they went they were marked men, and met with opprobrium, insult, and injury. As they passed through the streets the children ran after them. The people left their work, and hastened to make themselves sport. Nor was their curiosity and opposition confined to unhurtful manifestations. There was a cruelty exhibited which shows how little civilized is removed from savage life. In the words of a sufferer, "dirt, rotten eggs, brickbats, stones, and cudgels were Satan's arguments in vindication of his own cause." It was the common cry in town and country—"Press them for soldiers—send them on board men-of-war—transport them—beat them—send them to prison, or knock out their brains and dispatch

them at once!" This was no vain cry. Several of the first Methodists were pressed for soldiers unjustly. Even a bellman charged a double fee for announcing their meetings; and at a certain place in Cornwall, in the parish accounts, there is an item—7s. 6d.—for driving away the Methodists. At some places the meeting-houses were pulled down—the abodes of the members were broken into and plundered, while the preacher hardly escaped with his life. At one place, papers were put out by the rabble inviting all the country to rise with them and destroy the Methodists. And while these things were taking place, the officers bound by oath to put down every tumult, disgraced the sacred name of Justice by laughing at the fun, or putting out proclamations against those pernicious disturbers of the public peace—the Methodists.

A certain writer has said that the passions of men are the same in all ages, opportunities only differ. Here we might remark on the similarity of intolerance in all ages. It gave the poisoned cup to Socrates the Wise. It slaughtered the servants of God "on Alpine heights." It dyed the reign of Mary with a bloody hue, and stained the robe of the Virgin Queen. Cannot you see in the treatment of the Methodists a strong resemblance to that which certain men endured, who, eighteen hundred years ago, went out at God's command to preach the gospel to every creature? It was the old thing over again: Prejudice bitter as ever, and Gamaliel's advice forgotten.

To this treatment these noble men opposed a dignified conduct. "Be what they say true," said Mr. Wesley; "be it so that we are weak, silly men, without even a design or a desire of doing good. Yet I insist upon the fact: Christ is preached, and sinners are converted to God." And we may be sure that so much zeal must have had a great effect. The fact was incontestable that in various parts of the country there were numbers of people who, having received the witness of sins forgiven, were living in all holiness of life—that some who had been notorious for their great wickedness were now changed as the lion to the lamb; and better than all, many had died with the praises of God on their lips, whose stony hearts had melted under their ministry.

We should be sorry if any remark should be construed into ill-feeling towards the Church of England. No more has been said than is necessary. Indeed, there was opposition experienced from Dissenting ministers as well as from the clergy. In one place, three Dissenters agreed to refuse sacrament to any joining the Methodists. For it was a peculiarity of the new system that all it demanded was holiness of life. It left the opinions of men unfettered; and as the services were not held at the usual hours of public worship, anyone could be a Methodist, and yet remain in his own church. It is a happy thing for our times that the ministers of all denominations seem to have a solemn sense of their important duties. The Clergy is as different now-a-

days from what it was in the eighteenth century as is the present race of statesmen from that of the days of Bolingbroke and Walpole. Therefore, when we make remarks about the trials of early Methodists, we do it with the knowledge that a hundred years have so changed the character of the Church, that Grimshaw and Fletcher have many successors in their admiration of Wesley, and that no one will regret more than an honest clergyman the truth of our statements, or rejoice more in the change that has made Wesley admired by those who now fill the places of his strongest opposers.

Nor would it be just to include in one sweeping charge the whole of the clergy of the times to which we refer. Just as in the darkest periods of national history some of the brightest patriots have lived, and proved to what nobility of character mankind may be elevated by high principles, so in this time of degeneracy flourished several of the purest ornaments of the English Church. Methodism itself was born in the Church ; so that if she were to be blamed for her lethargy, it was from her own bosom sprang the apostles who repaired the fault. Not only so, but they, as we have said, entertained an ardent affection for the Establishment which must for ever prevent the Methodists from taking part against her. In many parts of the country where Wesley travelled, he found clergymen who welcomed him to their hearts, their homes, and their pulpits. Fletcher, of Madeley, lived and died a saintly Methodist and a consistent clergyman. Meriton.

was a fast friend and zealous co-worker; while Grimshaw, of Haworth, not only attended Conference, but frequently preached in Methodist Chapels.

This violent opposition only made them the more zealous. Whitfield became very popular amongst both rich and poor. Carried away by the resistless force of his unfaltering eloquence, they no longer remembered either his indiscretions or the attacks of his enemies. He became famous both in England and America. But there becomes a slight divergence in their paths. Whitfield—patronised by ladyships—flattered by lordships—yet nobly striving to keep his humility—Whitfield and Calvinism must need be separate from Wesley and Arminianism; for if there be one doctrine held by Protestants that Wesley cannot away with, it is that strange tenet which makes God unjust and the gospel unnecessary. So they parted, scarcely in anger, but like Abram and Lot—“Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between thee and me, for we are brethren.”

It has often been remarked that in the beginnings of most important things there has been little to indicate their future greatness. No one could see that the successors of a few British merchants on the Hooghly would one day be masters of India. It is because there is a power above, shaping the destinies of the world—using men as builders in the edifice of Time, but only gradually divulging to their astonished eyes the grandeur of the

whole design. Placing Methodism in the light of this truth, you will see that it is as marked a work of Providence as any in history. We have seen that the miserable condition of the people demanded some special effort—we have also seen that when men arose to make this effort they were received in so unfriendly a spirit that they had to reckon amongst their most determined enemies the men whose place it was to assist them. There remained but two plans—one was to give up the work, and entrust it to those who had so little claim to confidence; the other was to go on as they had commenced, with the Almighty and their conscience as witnesses of their sincerity. They were not the men to do the former—an awful sense of their responsibility rested upon them. Fear of man they knew not, but they dared not to offend God.

Some one has said that could Mr. Wesley have foreseen that he was forming a separate society he would have refrained. The person who said that but little understood the character of Wesley. It is very true that the Methodism of to-day is not what Wesley at the first designed. He never anticipated an independent church—yet that church has arisen, and is called by his name, too. All his life through he was called upon to yield his prejudices to the manifest designs of Providence. He never intended to be a field preacher, yet on Bristol highway, like Whitfield, he proclaimed salvation for dying men. He never designed to employ lay preachers—yet, when the time came, he

first allowed and then encouraged them. Logical and practical as was his mind, he was a dreamer in one respect—the union of his societies with the Established Church. And if the union was impossible while Wesley lived, it must be equally so now. Nor can it ever take place while on the one side there is the assumption of a superiority warranted neither by usefulness, learning, nor ability; and on the other, the fervent zeal for God and the consciousness of a success which, we are proud to say, has ever attended the labours of the Methodist ministry. It would indeed have been a great sorrow to him to have known that it would be so. But to have acted differently would have been to battle with the decrees of the Eternal. “For Zion’s sake he could not hold his peace.” Nay, something of the kind must often have passed through his mind. “Shall I refrain,” said he, “from doing good, because at some future time inconvenience may arise from it?” No! when he awoke to the sense of his life’s labour no affection or prejudice could come between him and duty. In the words of his most eloquent, but not most friendly biographer, “Sensible only of the good which he was producing, and which he saw produced, he went on courageously and indefatigably in his career. Whither it was to lead he knew not, nor what form and consistence the societies which he was collecting would assume; nor where he was to find labourers as he enlarged the field of his operations; nor how the scheme was

to derive its temporal support. But these considerations neither troubled him nor made him for a moment foresake his course. God, he believed, had appointed it, and God would always provide means for accomplishing his own ends."

Despite all enemies, these Methodist clergymen were greatly successful. Horace Walpole said the sect increased as fast almost as any religious nonsense ever did. Wherever they went they were listened to by large congregations. Whitfield addressed as far as twenty thousand at a time. Wesley, too, was followed by crowds almost equally large. No matter how fiercely the opposers raged, the majority of the multitudes hung on their words with the most devout attention. Often, indeed, the tumult of angry enemies was drowned in the sighings of the penitent, and the triumphant shoutings of the believing. The effect upon many of the hearers was singular and astonishing. Some were seized with strong pains in all their limbs. Others were taken with fits of trembling, and frequently they fell to the ground, these slain of the Lord, but not with carnal weapons. At times, the mighty alarm they were in was seen by the tears which streamed down their cheeks. Their frame torn with a strong convulsive motion, which required many to hold them, and which, in its nature, resembled neither epilepsy nor hysterics, attested the reality of the emotion, and caused an involuntary comparison with the casting out of devils in the early days of Christianity. Sometimes the

manifestation was different to any of these, and the person affected dropped to the ground, pale and motionless as one dead. There was nothing in their previous state of health that could at all account for these things; but when the convincing words fell on them "like a flame and a hammer," at once "the pain seized them and extorted these loud and bitter cries."

Now all this seemed very ridiculous to the worldly-minded. Because they could not comprehend they refused to believe it, and declared that these people were all fanatics, or worse. But the incredulous and the scoffers were themselves frequently convinced, and that in a remarkable manner. "It is all a cheat," said one man, "anyone might help crying out if he would." Next morning, while engaged in private prayer, "so horrible a dread overwhelmed him that he began crying out with all his might." Instances of this kind were frequently occurring. The subject reminds us of what took place at Jerusalem, when the apostles were filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues. "These men are full of new wine," said the unbelieving Jews. "These Methodists are fools," said the supercilious observer; but the apostles were not drunken, neither were the Methodists fools.

It must be confessed that there was, at times, something ludicrous in the sensation which the movement caused. How frequently were the friends of some poor sin-convicted penitent amazed

at the change in their relative, and at a loss to know what to do with him. The most common plan was to send for the vicar, who generally declared it to be a case of madness, and prescribed an immediate removal to the asylum. The mistaken hostility to these things was joined in by many sincere friends of Wesley. His brother Samuel entered the lists against him. He had much correspondence with John on the subject, and wrote strongly against the doctrines which abetted "spiritual fireballs, apparitions of the Father, visions, &c.," amongst the "new brotherhood," as well as against the necessity of the witness of the Spirit. But small impression could be expected to be made upon one who had himself experienced the truth of what he taught.

A difference of opinion exists as to the exact date of the foundation of the Methodist Church. Some date it from 1738, some from 1739, and others from 1740. It was on the 1st of May, 1738, that "our little society began which afterwards met in Fetter-lane." It was in 1739 that the society first met at the Foundry; and it was in 1740 that the Fetter-lane Society was divided. Which of these events should be considered the epoch of Methodism? At this time, religious societies were very common both in London and the provinces. At some of these societies (perhaps at all) it was the custom to read a collect or two, to repeat the Lord's Prayer, then expound a chapter from the Scriptures, and conclude with two or three more collects and a psalm. The

societies were, no doubt, the resort of people who were desirous of practising a truly religious life. But the formal manner in which they were conducted prevented the accomplishment of the good which they might have effected. Wesley felt this, and discerning truly enough that formality was out of place in a small company, meeting on week nights in a private room, resolved to avoid it. For, being at Mr. Fox's society, he says—"My heart was so full that I could not confine myself to the forms of prayer which we were accustomed to read there. Neither do I propose to be confined to them any more, but to pray indifferently with a form or without, as I may find suitable to particular occasions." The Fetter-lane Society, however, was in many respects of a very different character to the societies of which we have spoken, especially in the self-examination it required, and the open statement of the dealings of God with each individual since the previous meeting. They met "to confess their faults one to another, and to pray one for another, that they might be healed." But it would, no doubt, be found impossible in one evening to question and advise every member in the particular manner desired. Anyway, a month after the formation of the society, it was agreed "that the persons desirous of meeting together for that purpose should be divided into several bands or little companies, none of which should consist of fewer than five, or more than ten persons; that some person in each band should be desired to speak to

the rest in order, who might be called the leader of that band." They were to meet twice-a-week, when "everyone should speak as freely, plainly, and concisely as he could the state of his heart, with his several temptations and deliverances." In addition to this, they were all to meet together every Wednesday evening; to have once-a-month, on Saturdays, a day of general intercession; and a love-feast on the Sunday se'night.

This society, founded, as we have said, by the advice of Peter Boehler, was copied from the United Brethren, and was not so much Methodist as it was Moravian. Boehler left England for Carolina, and the Wesleys went up and down the country preaching and forming similar societies. The London bands were left under the care of John Bray, the pious mechanic, at whose house Charles Wesley had found the way of life. For a time, their peace flowed as a river, until one Molther came with a lying doctrine, and sadly beguiled them. They had been used to read the Bible much, to pray much, to be very constant at Church, and also in partaking of the Holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Their meetings were scenes of delightful spiritual enjoyment, and of frequent conversions. Showers of Divine blessings fell so abundantly that they could hardly conclude, they were so loath to part. But in little more than a year a strange notion of "stillness" threatened to spoil all their goodness. One of the Moravians, in preaching, said he had been unable to find Christ

in the ordinances, although he had long sought Him; but, ceasing to seek Him in this way, he at once found Him. From this, there spread a belief that they were not commanded to attend the ordinances of God's house—that it was wrong even to do so, until after being justified. Nay, stranger still, they asserted that having been pardoned, and washed in the waters of regeneration, it was then a matter of indifference whether they attended the service of the sanctuary or not—they might please themselves. One of them said: “If we read the Devil reads with us; if we pray he prays with us; if we go to Church or Sacrament he goes with us.” Enter into thy closet to pray did not mean private prayer, but simply enter into the closet of thy heart. One of them, who was taken to see a dying woman who longed for peace with God, told her it signified nothing to pray either publicly or privately. Reading the Scriptures or taking the Sacrament was equally useless; these outward things must be laid aside, she had nothing to do but to be still. The result was natural. Many were deceived by this folly, and lost their confidence; they could not believe that they had ever had true faith, for they had found their peace in the ordinances—a clear proof that they had been mistaken. They began to be late in their attendance at meeting, and to leave as soon as their names were called over. A clique met privately to consult, and arrange matters as if they were the whole body, while outside observers predicted the speedy division of the society.

Spirituality can never survive long where there is contention. The members soon sank from pious zeal to haughty indifference and to bitter animosity, while those who retained their first love were laughed at, and the happy cries of pardoned sinners were nothing but “animal spirits.”

Sorely did all this grieve Wesley’s heart. “My soul,” said he, “is sick of this sublime divinity. Let me think and speak as a little child. Let my religion be plain, artless, and simple. Meekness, temperance, patience, faith, and love—be these my highest gifts; and let the highest words wherein I teach them be those I learn from the book of God.”

He hastened to London, and endeavoured, with the assistance of his brother and Mr. Ingham, to stem the torrent. He proved from Scripture the heresy of which the Quietests were guilty. They said that there were no degrees of faith, and that no man was justified who had the least doubt or fear. He proved that there were degrees of faith, and that weak faith may yet be true faith. They said that having believed, there remained thereafter nothing for them to do. He showed there were many commandments to obey. They said ordinances were nothing. He proved they were not only incumbent, but blessed means of grace. They derided good works. He showed that they were bound to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to assist the stranger, and to visit and relieve those who were sick or in prison. But it was all in vain that he pleaded with them. They thought they

had found a better way, and openly spoke against allowing Wesley to preach at their society. Feeling that an end must be made of these injurious dissensions, he took counsel with a few friends at his mother's, consulting her whose advice was so valuable in seasons of difficulty. Having made up his mind what to do, he went to the love-feast, and at the conclusion, read a paper which detailed their errors, and then, calling upon those who agreed with him to follow, he withdrew, accompanied by eighteen or nineteen more.

In the meantime, a small society was springing up in another part of the City, over which Wesley had entire control, and which he himself regarded as the parent Wesleyan Society. In November, 1739, several gentlemen went to Wesley, requesting his spiritual advice, and desiring him to spend some time in prayer with them. He consented, and appointed a weekly meeting on Thursday evenings. "This was the rise of the United Society, first in London, and then in other places. Such a Society is no other than 'a company of men having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.'" These few words describe in brief the entire design of the early Methodists; and although these things were all tending towards the establishment of an independent church, they did not foresee it, nor did it follow as a matter of course.

Differing in no respect from many of the clergy, who not only regarded it with favour, but united heartily in the labour, and willingly bore the contumely of the enterprise, the chiefs of this reformation trusted to see the whole body leavened with the same leaven. And truly, small thanks are due to the men who banished from their communion some of the wisest and best of their ministers. No one can calculate the benefits that must have accrued to the Establishment if she had welcomed to her bosom those who desired nothing more than to live and die within her pale. Far better would it have been for her if she had imitated the wisdom of the Roman Church, and given her sanction to that which she could not stop. She might have had an auxiliary which would have helped her on in a career of undreamt-of prosperity. This is humanly speaking; in reality we cannot doubt that for the world it was better that the Methodists should be thrust out.

At the time, Wesley attached no peculiar importance to the formation of this little society. He made no note of it in his journal then. Nor do we find any reference to it till some time afterwards, unless, indeed, that “smaller company” be it, to which, when in trouble, he went from Fetter-lane on the 29th of December, and where his heart was cheered by the joys of united prayer.

In April, 1740, Charles Wesley preached at the Foundery, and his “heart was enlarged in prayer for the infant society.” The Foundery was an old

Government building, which had been placed at Wesley's disposal by some friends, and which was for many years the head-quarters of Methodism. To this place, three days after—being Wednesday, the day all the bands were accustomed to meet together—Wesley brought the few who stood faithful amidst the dissensions of Fetter-lane. Twenty-five brethren and forty-seven sisters composed this first Wesleyan Methodist Society. It was, no doubt, conducted in the same way as that of Fetter-lane, the members being divided into bands, men meeting with men, and women with women. Their numbers rapidly augmented, so that the following year they counted 900, and 1,100 in 1742; while in various parts of the country there were established numerous societies on the same system. In a short time, as this growth continued, some of the best-qualified were appointed to see a certain number of the members weekly. It came about in this manner. There were a few amongst them who grew tired of the labour of serving God. Their behaviour was not seemly for professors, and brought discredit upon the cause; and as in London there was some difficulty in overseeing the members, it became a serious question what must be done. One day, Mr. Wesley was talking with several of the society at Bristol about a way to pay their society debts. “Let every member give a penny-a-week till all are paid,” said one. “But,” replied another, “many of them are poor, and cannot afford to do it.” “Then,” answered the former, “put

eleven of the poorest with me, and if they can give anything—well. I will call on them weekly, and if they can give nothing, I will give for them as well as for myself; and each of you call on eleven of your neighbours weekly, receive what they give, and make up what is wanting."

Montesqueu remarks of the Romans, that one great cause of their power was their readiness to adopt improvements, no matter whence derived. Wesley had the happy talent of appropriating, of re-shaping, and of carrying out the half-devised schemes of others. His practical mind at once saw that the suggestion of the Bristol Methodist was good, and it was accordingly acted upon. In their rounds, the leaders, for so they were designated, found that some of their flock were not living as they ought. Why, here, thought Mr. Wesley, is that which we have long sought. He called the leaders together, and desired them to make diligent inquiry into the spiritual state of those they saw each week. By this means, some disorderly walkers were detected, and some were turned from the error of their ways. The same plan was carried into effect in London and all other places, and the good results were speedily seen. At the beginning, as we have said, the leaders visited their charge at their homes, but for several reasons this was discontinued. It took up much time. The relatives of some and the masters of others were not pleased with this visiting. There arose also some bickerings and misunderstandings, so that it was finally

arranged that the members of each class should meet together once a week. In this simple manner were class meetings established in 1742. And to make them still more effective for good Mr. Wesley determined to talk with every member at least once in three months, to learn from themselves their progress in the Christian career. To all whose state was satisfactory, he gave a ticket prepared for the purpose, containing a Bible text and the person's name written thereon, which was a testimony wherever he went that he was one of the Society. These classes consisted of from twelve to fifteen persons, and the only condition of membership was to have a desire to flee from the wrath to come.

But if a man really desires to be good, he will show it in his life. They were therefore expected to refrain from all sin, whether open or secret. They were not to be drunken, not to fight, and not to smuggle. They were not to use many words in buying and selling, nor were they to give or take usury. Nay, they were not even to put on costly apparel, nor to indulge in any softness or needless indulgence on the one hand, nor on the other to lay up treasure on earth. And while they thus refrained from all evil, they were not to neglect to do all the good in their power—first to the bodies of men, by clothing and feeding the poor, and secondly, to their souls, by reproving and directing them. And they were especially to help their brethren, by employing them, or buying of them,

or helping them in business. Such were, and are, the healthy regulations of the Methodist Society.

Band meetings were continued, and were stricter in their character than class meetings. For in addition to rules equally strict as to outward conduct, such as total abstinence from spirituous liquors, from pawning, from the wearing of rings, necklaces, ruffles, &c., they were to be willing to hear their faults, and all that people said about them. They were, in a word, to tell all their spiritual sorrows and joys. Nor were they to shrink from being cut to the quick, and their heart sought to the bottom. Exception has been taken to the confessional character of these meetings; but every attempt to compare them to the practice of the Church of Rome must fail, since they exclude all idea of human absolution for sin. While class meetings have succeeded so wonderfully, band meetings have fallen into a disuse which is almost general. Nor is it only of late years that this has been the case. At the very first Conference, it was thought necessary to propose means for their encouragement, and the same necessity was felt in many subsequent Conferences.

While these things were taking place, a movement was on foot which gave an unexpected turn to affairs, and led to results never dreamt of by Wesley; we refer to the employment of lay agency. From the first there was manifested a tendency amongst the more ardent ones to pass the limits usually allowed to laymen. As early as 1739 it was

a matter of considerable discussion as to whether lay preaching were proper or not; and when Charles Wesley lifted his voice against it, John Bray openly reproved him for "checking the course of the Spirit." But neither Whitfield nor the Wesleys could tolerate these "self-ordained priests." It was not long, however, before they changed their opinion on this point. One evening in May, 1739, Wesley was preaching at Bristol, and declaring that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. The Word was with mighty power, hard hearts were softened, and sleeping souls were aroused. One young man fell to the ground under the sharp arrows of conviction, and soon "began to roar out and beat himself against the ground, so that six men could scarcely hold him," but he shortly experienced pardoning mercy, and rejoiced in his reconciled God. This young man's name was Thomas Maxfield. The Wesleys took to him, and formed a close connection with him, taking him with them to their societies, and allowing him to act as a sort of clerk. He read the Scriptures occasionally in public, and also visited the bands, sometimes in company with themselves, sometimes alone. To go a step further was not much, yet Wesley was greatly astonished when he received a letter stating that Maxfield had mounted from the reading desk to the pulpit, and had begun to preach. It wounded the prejudice born of his education, that one whose head had not been touched by bishop's hands should minister in

holy things. He returned in haste to London, and broke in abruptly upon his mother, who resided at the Foundery. "Thomas Maxfield has turned preacher, I find," said he, evidently speaking with unusual warmth. But that wise woman, for wise she was, at once threw cold water over the rising flame. Maxfield had evident gifts. He had gained the favour of his hearers, his preaching had been effective—what clearer proof could be required of his fitness for the work. She warned her son against interfering with Maxfield, assuring him that his call to the ministry was as undoubted as his own. But it could not stay there. If one layman could be permitted to preach, why might not any number? The consequence was natural. Thomas Maxfield was the first of an order of men, so original in their character as to deserve more than a passing notice.*

Nearly every writer on Methodism has given great prominence to the name of John Nelson, the Yorkshire stonemason, who had, says Southey, "the bravest heart that ever Englishman was blessed with." When quite a boy, he had religious impressions. At ten years of age, he was so alarmed and terrified while his father was reading a chapter in *Revelations*, that he fell with his face to the floor, and wept till the ground was soaked with his tears. From that time, he could not sin

* Their lives, written by themselves, at Mr. Wesley's request, for the *Arminian Magazine*, were compiled by the Rev. Thomas Jackson, and published in 1837. It is a deeply-interesting work, of which a cheap edition is desirable.

in peace, for whenever he was alone he was the slave of a guilty conscience, under whose lashings he formed resolutions which were only made to be broken, so that when temptation came they “were as threads of tow that had touched the fire.” A sermon he heard at Church, and the death of his father, increased his anxiety for his spiritual welfare, and his mind dwelt so much on the subject, that it was present even in his dreams. He met with a suitable person, and was married to her; and shortly afterwards he went to work in London. His fellow-workmen were great swearers, and abused him because he would not drink and royster with them; they even went to the length of taking away his tools, so that he might not work while they were drinking. Desirous as he was of living at peace, his spirit could not brook this, and he fought with them, after which they let him alone. Being careful and industrious, the Lord prospered him, so that he had money enough and to spare—yet he was not happy. Harmless as his life had been, he could not bear to reflect on thirty years spent without God; nor was he happier when he remembered that he must give an account to the Almighty of all his thoughts, words, and actions. Wishing he had never been born, he “wandered up and down in the fields when he had done his work, meditating what course to take to save his soul.” He went to Church, but came away unenlightened. He tried the Dissenters, but he was no better. The Roman Catholics failed to satisfy the longings of

his soul, nor could the Quakers lead him into the way of peace. So he was fain to come back to the Church, “and read and pray, whether he perished or not.” He heard Mr. Whitfield at Moorfields, and got a little light, which only served to make his darkness more visible. At last Wesley came, and made a profound impression upon him. He continued to hear the Methodists with great delight, and to speak of them to his fellow-workmen. But they were alarmed for Nelson, and warned him against going to hear Mr. Wesley, who would, they thought, bring him to ruin. He was not to be so dissuaded, but continued to seek for peace, and went mourning till the day-star should arise on his soul. He could neither eat nor sleep with comfort. When he sat down to his meat, he cried, “Shall such a wretch as I devour the good creatures of God in the state I am now in? No; I deserve to be thrust into hell.” He determined neither to eat nor drink till he had obtained the mercy he sought. He fell on his knees before God, and while the tears flowed from his eyes “like great drops of rain,” with broken heart petitioned for pardon. While he knelt, the blessing came, and filled his soul with joy, so that he began to sing, “O Lord, I will praise thee; though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me; behold, God is my salvation: I will trust and not be afraid, for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation.”

His landlady told him to seek fresh lodgings,

“for her husband was afraid some mischief would come either on them or him, with so much praying and fuss as he had made about religion.” But when he was about to leave them, they would not let him go; for the man had said to his wife: “Suppose John should be right, and we wrong, it will be a sad thing to turn him out of doors.” So he remained with them, and they became hearers of Mr. Wesley. His master wished him to work on Sunday, but he refused, much to his astonishment, and he threatened to discharge him. On Monday, he went to bring away his tools, but his master spoke kindly to him, and bade him set the men to work; and from that time he treated him with more than his former kindness. After a time he returned to Yorkshire, where he worked at his trade, in the evenings preaching and explaining the Scriptures to his neighbours, and was eventually appointed by Wesley to the office of “helper.”

In many respects a different character was John Haime, the soldier Methodist. He was of a restless, roving disposition, and much given to all manner of wickedness. Yet God, who visits all men, did not leave him to himself, but troubled his conscience, so that he “began to wander about at the river side, and through woods and solitary places, looking up to heaven, with many times a heart ready to break, thinking he had no part there.” These times of mournful contemplation were followed by seasons of infatuated debauchery, in which he sought to banish the thoughts which troubled him. But all in vain

were his efforts to escape the powerful striving of the Spirit. He went to bed in terror. If he closed his eyes it was with the dread of opening them in hell. If he slept, his dreams were of tormenting devils, of the judgment day, and of the world on fire. No wonder if reason should almost reel under such deep emotions as these. He would have destroyed himself, but the fear of hell prevented him. He believed himself the very worst man in all the world, and to have sinned away his day of mercy; "yet all this time he kept to the Church, though he was often afraid to go there, lest the Church or the tower should fall upon him." He renewed his search after peace. He read, and fasted, and went to Church, and prayed seven times a day. At last, in answer to so many prayers and sighs, the Lord took the veil away, and revealed himself unto him as a God pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin.

Before this, Haime had enlisted into the army; and going with his regiment to Brentford, he had the happiness to hear Mr. Charles Wesley preach, and had the privilege of conversing with him, too. Afterwards, he went with the army to Flanders, where, with two or three more, he preached to the soldiers, and with such good effect that they soon had a society of 300 members, with several preachers. As might be expected, many of the drunken and swearing officers and men were much opposed to these unusual meetings, and Haime remarks that he had three armies against him—the French army, the wicked English army, and an

army of devils. But true soldiers of the Cross are not to be deterred by any host, however mighty, from sustaining the conflict. John Haime and his pious comrades continued their "preachments," so that their example spread to the Hanoverian army, some of whom began to imitate the English Methodists, and to have religious meetings, until they were put down by their officers.

They played no cowardly part, these English Methodists, on the field of Fontenoy, where British valour was nullified by Dutch cowardice. Wounds could not depress them. Lying there in their blood, and racked with pain, they cried: "I am going to my beloved; come Lord Jesus, come quickly." One, having his arm broken by a musket ball, refused to be removed from the field, saying: "No; I have an arm left to hold my sword; I will not go yet." Another shot broke the other arm, but he still maintained his cheerfulness. John Evans was seen with both legs broken, laid across a cannon, while his life ebbed out, praising God, and shouting victory with his latest breath. This unfortunate yet glorious battle robbed Haime of many of his dearest friends, but it proved the value of the religion they possessed. After many trials and temptations, Haime, having returned to England, and been discharged from the army, was employed by Wesley as a travelling preacher.

But not untaught and simple were all the early Methodist preachers. Few men of that day could surpass Thomas Walsh in knowledge of the original

languages of the Bible. He was an Irishman and a Roman Catholic. His father was a carpenter, and destined his son for the same trade, but being disappointed in some situation he was kept at school, where he continued till he was nineteen years of age, making great progress in scholarship. When he attained this age he left school, and set up an academy of his own. Previous to this, for many years, he had had unutterable longings for a closer knowledge of God; but could find nothing in the worship of the Church of Rome nor in the counsels of the priest to satisfy the yearnings of his soul. His brother had become a Protestant, and frequently spoke with him on religious matters, but for long he resisted all his proposals; yet in secret he prayed that God would enlighten him, and his prayer was answered; for after a candid examination of the arguments he abjured the Church of Rome, and became a member of the Church of England. When the Methodists went to Ireland, and delivered in cities and villages the message they had sounded over England, his heart warmed towards them, and in September, 1749, he joined their little society. Mr. Wesley allowed him to preach, recommending him to do so in the Irish language; and so effective was his ministry that "in one place the priest informed his congregation that Walsh had been servant-boy to a certain priest, and having stolen his master's books, he had learned to preach by that means." And now he began to study the Hebrew language with intense application. Often he would

spend fourteen hours together in this study, only desisting for prayer. His success in the acquirement of this language was remarkable. Wesley said that "if he was questioned concerning any Hebrew word in the Old or any Greek word in the New Testament, he would tell after a little pause not only how often the one or the other occurred in the Bible, but also what it meant in every place." He attributed it to the special assistance of God that he was "enabled to read His blessed Word in the first and best of languages almost as well as Latin or English." He was employed in England as well as Ireland, and after a short but useful career died in Dublin, at the age of 28.

But the plan we have marked out for ourselves in this little work forbids us to sketch, even thus briefly, the lives of others of this race of worthy men. To Wesleyans their names are "familiar as household words." Hopper and Cownly—Olivers and Pawson—Hanly and Mather—are all treasured in the records of Methodism—loved for their labours, and admired for their courage, as at once the builders and the ornaments of their society.

It should be observed that they did not at once go out as regular preachers. They wrought daily at their business, and in the evening, frequently at the request of their neighbours, addressed a few plain people in a plain way. Sometimes, they did not go so far as to preach, but merely met with a few like-minded with themselves, and together read the Scriptures and the Methodist publications.

Sometimes they would go to a village a few miles away, and in some humble cot deliver the gospel message. They were, in effect, first local, and afterwards, when their gifts were evident, travelling preachers. Others were led to preach in a way altogether unexpected by themselves. In the place where John Furz lived there was a small society of Dissenters, who met every Sunday evening at a private house. Led by that instinct which religious people have to associate with their own sort, Furz requested permission for himself and a friend to attend this meeting. When he went he found it rather a different society to what he had expected. About ten men were seated round a table, on which, in close proximity, were placed the Bible, a newspaper, and a decanter and glasses. The proceedings consisted in abuse of the Vicar, the Churchwardens, and the overseers of the poor, the dryness of the subject being taken off by frequent recourse to the liquor. But to give a religious air to the meeting, a chapter was read and a prayer spoken at the conclusion. Naturally enough, the two sincere seekers after truth were amazed, and Furz broke forth into a loud prayer on behalf of the mistaken men. They were taken aback at his conduct, but invited him to come next Sunday. In the meantime, it spread abroad that Furz had preached, and when next Sunday came about a hundred persons assembled round the door of the house; and when Furz entered, as many as could poured in after him. There was no help for it now, so—although he

had never thought of it till then, he opened his Testament and began to preach. When the thought first came into Thomas Hanby's head that he must preach, he fancied it was a temptation from the Devil, and endeavoured to banish the presumptuous idea from his mind. It was with him a time of intense anxiety, in which he was harrassed with the fear of running before he was sent, or of committing Jonah's sin. Distressed beyond measure, and afraid to mention his case to any one, he fell into despondency, and like Job, became weary of a life which he regarded as useless. "O let me die," cried he, "for it is better for me to die than to live." From this state of despair he was aroused in a remarkable but characteristic manner. Hearing that a poor dying woman was "wonderfully happy," he sought and obtained an interview. Before going, he prayed that God would show him a token by which he should know whether he was called to preach or not. When he came to the bedside, the dying woman, looking earnestly at him, said, "God has called you to preach the gospel; you have long neglected the call, but He will make you go." Nothing more was needed to decide him, and he at once commenced a career of apostleship, the results of which gave ample proof that the call was a true one. Christopher Hopper had great doubts concerning his call to the work. He went into a wood in great depression, "clouds and darkness surrounded me, and my spirit was troubled within me. I said, my enemies are too strong for me; there are few on

the Lord's side, but myriads against him. What shall I do ? Alas, 'my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least of my father's house.' 'I am a worm, and no man.' O, my God, let me enjoy this sweet solitude, and see my friends and companions no more. Let me live as a hermit in this lonely desert, till my few days are ended; then shall my weary spirit be at rest." He entered into a thorough examination of his own heart, and it was only after arriving at a settled conviction of his duty that he took upon himself to preach the gospel. Their ordination was a very simple one. The humble candidate knelt down before Wesley, who said to him, putting the New Testament into his hands, "Take thou authority to preach the gospel," and gave him his blessing.

But it was no light labour that these men gave themselves up to. While they continued local preachers, after working all the week, they would on Sundays set off at early morning, and visit villages many miles away, returning at night more weary than they were all the week beside. Under the walls of old castles, in cockpits, in private houses, and even in ale-houses, they undauntedly protested against the wickedness of men. And when called out they had to endure great trials. Long after the storm of persecution against Wesley personally had subsided, it raged mightily against the devoted lay preachers. "They dispensed," says Christopher Hopper, "with two or three awakened clergymen tolerably well. These were regularly-ordained men

of learning—gentlemen and divines; but to see a ploughman or an honest mechanic stand up to preach the gospel—it was unsufferable. Hell was moved from beneath; a council was called; the edict went forth, and war was declared.” And savagely was that war carried on. Sometimes the unfortunate preacher was thrown into a pond—sometimes into pools of standing water. Thomas Mitchell, after being tormented in this way, was besmeared all over with white paint, carried to another deep pond, and cast by main force into the water. Insensible by reason of so much cruelty, Mitchell was only saved from drowning by being fished out at the end of a pole. Satisfied at length with what had been done, the minister of the place directed the mob to take him out of the parish, which they did, shouting by way of a parting salute, “God save the King, and the devil take the preacher.” “They often preached,” says Thomas Hanby, “while the blood ran down their faces by the blows and pointed arrows thrown at them while they were preaching.” The church-bells were frequently desecrated for the service of Satan, and rung to drown the voice of the preacher, while the fire-engines were also brought to disperse the enthusiastic Methodists. At other times, the pressgang would carry off the unoffending apostle amidst the derision of the depraved rabble. Thomas Beard died from the effects of his ill-treatment, and many had to complain of the brutal conduct of the soldiers. Thomas Lee was pulled from his horse,

and dragged by the hair of his head into a house, where he was thrown with his back upon the edge of the stone stairs, then he was rolled into the common sewer, and afterwards taken to the bridge and thrown into the water. One magistrate, when appealed to for protection by the Methodist, delivered him into the hands of the mob, who had already half-killed him, and cried, "Huzza, boys, well done; stand up for the Church." Narrow indeed were the escapes they had from the cruelty of a populace we can scarcely recognize as English. Sometimes they got away disguised in the homely garb of a friendly quaker. Sometimes they had to wander in the fields, and endeavour to find their way home in the darkness of night; and sometimes they were fain to push forward their horses, and retreat amidst a volley of oaths, curses, and rotten eggs.

But it would be a bootless task to multiply instances of the annoyances they were all subjected to. To tell how they were pelted with stones, put in the stocks, chased through the streets, knocked on the head—in a word, all but killed by the rabble rout. If they had not been heroes they would have succumbed; but they feared nothing, and were as willing as ever St. Paul was to be offered up if necessary. They obeyed an impulse stronger than any earthly influence. It was all the same to them whether the world smiled or frowned; and the words James Montgomery wrote of one of them might justly be applied to all.

Bent on such glorious toils,
The world to him was loss;
But all his trophies, all his spoils,
He hung upon the cross.

That human learning is not necessary to the ministerial work, is proved by our Lord's election for his disciples of poor, unlearned men, without worldly wisdom and without family influence, for God chose the weak things of the world to confound the mighty. But what was lacking in learning was more than made up by their ardent zeal. Endowed by the Almighty with His own Spirit, they boldly confronted the enemies of God and man, and were more than a match for error, however learned its advocates might be. Without placing these early Methodists in the same rank as the immortal twelve, we may be allowed to cast all cavils behind their illustrious example, and to show that there is nothing in the thing itself that can be successfully opposed by argument.

Yet it must not be supposed that they were allowed to preach and labour without making any effort to improve their own intellectual growth. They were to read and study as much as their almost incessant labours would allow, so that many of them became very respectable scholars indeed.

Feeble were the aggressions then made by the Church on the strongholds of sin, and the people were left to follow the devices of their own heart. If they went to church it was very well, and if they stayed away it was much the same. So they were

left undisturbed to fight and swear, or at best to sleep their lives away. And here we could not do better than quote from a recent work, written by a member of the Roman Catholic Church. He says “after the middle of the century multitudes of human beings commenced to crowd around the newly opening manufacturing and mining centres in the northern counties. Neither they nor their employers took much thought about their religious concerns. Hampered by their legal status, and traditionally suspicious of anything approaching to enthusiasm, the clergy of the Established Church neglected this new demand on their charity, and miners and factory hands would have grown up as pagans in a Christian land, had not the Wesleyan Irregulars flung themselves into the breach, and endeavoured to bring the gospel, according to their understanding of it, within the reach of these unintended flocks.*

It was to congregations of this class of the community that the Methodists most commonly preached with effect. Now alone, and now attended by one of his lay “helpers” would Wesley stand and melt their hearts with the sweet story of the Cross, while hill and dale rung with hymns of praise; until from Cornwall to Northumberland, and across the borders into Scotland, the poor had the gospel preached unto them. Choosing a convenient place, frequently in a low part of the town, with brave John Nelson or zealous Thomas

* Arnold's Manual of English Literature.

Taylor by his side, he would give out a hymn, and straightway begin to sing. First would come, perhaps, "twenty or thirty wild children, who could not properly be said to be either clothed or naked." Then the company would swell until the scores became hundreds, and the hundreds thousands. Simple as were the people, they could easily understand the straightforward and earnest preacher. The big tears would run down their cheeks; some would shout for very joy, and others, in the excitement of the moment and yielding to their unsophisticated nature, would clap their heavy hands on the preacher's back in token of their admiration.

It was mainly among such rough specimens of humanity that Wesley formed his first societies. "Most of them," said he, "were barefaced heathens. They were not Christians, unless there are drunken Christians, cursing and swearing Christians. If these were Christians, they were what the Malabrians call devil Christians." These were the people who awoke to the startling fact that they had immortal souls which might be lost, and who waited patiently at street corners, at lane ends, and in green fields, to learn the way to save them. The new apostles sought them in their haunts, and under blazing sun or drenching rain called them to repentance.

And what glorious scenes must these have been when those heaven-sent men were delivering their message. To see ill-clad, unkempt, repulsive men listen till the harshness faded from their faces, to

be succeeded by a ray divine that shone in their tearful eyes ; to see the impudent stare die away from the countenances of slatternly women, and be replaced by an expression of sorrowful shame-facedness ;—to note the glowing interest as the preacher proceeded, rising higher and higher, until unable longer to contain themselves, they broke forth into loud cries of penitence, and, like the distressed jailor at Philippi, eagerly demanded what they must do to be saved.

His mission done, the preacher of the Gospel would set off, either on foot or riding some humble specimen of the equine race, to repeat in a distant part of the country the same labour, and to encounter the same trials. But the seed fell upon good ground, and soon spread widely. It was not long before every town of importance, and nearly every village, had a “cause” meeting in the house of some pious man, who generally acted as leader and local preacher both ; and who was, when fitted for the task, promoted to the more laborious and honourable duty of an itinerant.

Thus was established a society which now counts its members in Great Britain by hundreds of thousands—in America by millions ; whose agents are in the dark places of the earth, preaching and translating the Word ; which annually subscribes considerably more than £100,000 for missions, and which has a literature of no small merit. If we consider the vast number of people who, in addition to its members, attend its chapels, and if we

remember the good that must be done privately by so many people whose walk is in accordance with their profession ; if we also call to mind the effects that Methodism has had upon other churches in stirring them up to a proper rivalry—we must conclude that, as in the beginning, the blessing of God supported its founders in their trials—it has also accompanied their successors in their labours.

It was not from any prospective earthly reward that these men laboured so cheerfully. “ No reward merely temporal,” said Dr. Johnson, “ could repay them for such indefatigable labours.” “ I pray you,” asks Wesley, “ for what pay could we engage men for this work ?” Certainly, if they had looked for good pay, they would have found themselves wofully disappointed, and would have given up the work in disgust. “ In those days,” says Christopher Hopper, “ we had no provision made for preachers’ wives. He that had a staff might take it, go without, or stay at home.” When John Furz’s wife was taken ill, she had to sell her clothes to buy necessaries. This evil was afterwards remedied by an allowance of four shillings a week, which Alexander Mather’s wife was the first to obtain—an arrangement that lasted for many years. At Berwick, Thomas Mitchell’s heart was touched with the case of a poor woman “ with a heavy child upon her back,” who was travelling into Scotland. Ninepence was all the money he had, and next day he must ride thirty miles ; but he could not see the poor woman set off penniless, so he gave her sixpence out

of his little store. Next day a soldier gave him two shillings: "so," says he, "God rewarded me four-fold. I could not help praising him for this instance of his goodness to me." Who will dispute the faith of these men when so small a gift is valued as being not from men but from God? When John Jane died, "all his clothes, linen and woollen, stockings, hat and wig, were not thought sufficient to answer his funeral expenses, amounting to £1 17s. 3d.—all the money he had was 1s. 4d."—"Enough," remarks Wesley, "for any unmarried preacher of the gospel to leave to his executors." John Downes was still worse off for worldly possessions; for at his death the only money he left to his widow was sixpence. Poor Thomas Hanby was robbed near Canterbury of his watch and all the money he had in the world, which was 2s. 8d. Sooth to say, it was nothing fresh to him to be without money; "for sometimes, if a halfpenny would have purchased the three kingdoms, I had it not for weeks together." Who will wonder if they were sometimes tempted to give up a work which entailed so much poverty, or refuse to sympathise with one of them, when on a cold winter's day, covered with snow, on a bleak mountain in Northumberland, he was tempted to return to his school, or some other business, to procure bread; and who will not admire the faith which sustained him as the passage: "When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye anything?—And they said, Nothing, Lord," came into his mind, he cried out with a loud voice, "Nothing, Lord; nothing,

Lord," and felt nerved to the conflict? The following words of Thomas Taylor will show more clearly the nature of their work and pay:—"What I did was gratis—not even having a penny for the turnpikes—except that the steward of Bradford Circuit gave me once half-a-guinea, and when I set out for the Conference the steward of Leeds Circuit gave me fifteen shillings. I had a little money of my own, and some articles to dispose of; the latter I left in the hands of a person to sell for me, which he did, and, being poor, he disposed of the money, and soon after died, so that business was settled. I set out for London, and from thence into Wales; here my work was rugged and disagreeable enough. I had no quarterage, no travelling expenses, but now and then a shilling or half-crown was put into my hands. Sometimes I was obliged to dine and lodge at an inn, and to pay both for my horse and myself. I was sent from the Leeds Conference back to Pembrokeshire, as it seemed a likely place for doing good, nor had I one shilling given me either for the expense of my journey or for my support when I got thither. But it may be said, 'How did you live?' I lived upon my own stock till Providence raised me friends." There is not in the Methodistic literature a more interesting chapter than that in which this same Thomas Taylor tells his preaching adventures in Scotland. How he entered Glasgow, friendless and unknown, to begin an entirely new work there. How his congregation commenced with two bakers' boys and two old women. How he found it a hard task to "stand in

the open air and preach to nobody.” How, as the people did not know the Methodist hymns, he had to sing the Scotch psalms, and was charged 13s. 4d. by the man who began the tunes for him, whereupon he “dismissed him and the Scotch psalms together.” How he found the Scotch people respectful, but cold; and how, finding at first so little hospitality, he was reduced to great straits. How he fasted oftener to suit his pocket than his conscience, and how he was frequently in the habit of “desiring his landlady not to provide anything for dinner, and a little before noon dressed himself and walked out till after dinner, and then went home to his hungry room, with a hungry belly,” which made the landlady think he had been out dining, and, of course, “saved his credit.”

The scant pay they received led some of them to make up what they lacked by trading. Mr. Rowell kept “a small shop near the Market-cross in Barnard Castle with an assortment of china, brushes, hats, tea, and other articles, which his wife managed.” Many of them were accustomed to hawk a few things about with them, a principal article of their commerce being medicinal “drops,” which their wives manufactured and they sold, thus caring at once for body and soul both. But Conference put a stop to this by deciding that “no preacher who will not relinquish his trade of buying and selling, though it were only pills, drops or balsams, shall be considered as a travelling preacher.”

No one, after reading the foregoing remarks, will doubt the sincerity of Thomas Hanby, when he says,

“In weariness and painfulness, in hunger and thirst, in joy and sorrow, in weakness and trembling, my days were now spent. And I have frequently thought if God would excuse me from this hard task, how gladly should I embrace the life of a shoebblack or of a shepherd’s boy.” There was not in this anything very pleasing to flesh and blood, and we may be pretty sure of a man’s call when it induces him to give up ease and plenty for hard work and poverty.

There was in their character, as in that of Wesley, a depth of faith that often caused them to be regarded as too enthusiastic. In this respect they were much like their illustrious chief. Nor was it strange that men whose thoughts were entirely bent on spiritual things, who had tasted the powers of the world to come, and who thought every action in life inspired by heaven or hell, should see events in a light different to the worldly-minded. They were earnest men, these early Methodists, who were fully convinced of the righteousness of their cause. They believed that a special Providence watched over them; that unseen beings took part in their conflicts, and that their trials were not unnoticed by the Almighty eye. In truth, there were not wanting instances that would satisfy a weaker faith than theirs. Once, when an attentive audience were listening to the preacher, the minister of the parish, the town clerk, and a magistrate, went to the place where the people were assembled. The magistrate read the riot act, after which the preacher said, “Sir, was there any appearance of riot here till you

came?" The fiery magistrate angrily cried, "Thou rascal!" Immediately the blood gushed from his nostril, and he sunk to the ground, crying, "They will say this is a judgment," and from that hour he was crazed. One man, while speaking to the society at Kingswood against the Wesleys, went raving mad, and was sent off to Bedlam, while another "poor wretch, who cursed and blasphemed, and laboured with his might to hinder the Word of God, boasted what he would do next Sunday; but on that day he was buried." Of course we will not presume to say that these were judgments, but there is small wonder if these simple-minded men regarded them as such.

They were also frequently astonished at the sudden change in their enemies. It not unfrequently happened that those "who came to scoff remained to pray," and went away in love with them they had sworn to murder. Sometimes, when the riot was assuming dangerous dimensions, and the noise of screamings and blasphemy was awful to hear, the ringleader would suddenly turn round and declare he would defend the preacher with his life. An amusing instance of the sudden conversion of an enemy is recorded by Duncan Wright. A little society at Wexford were accustomed to meet in a barn, where they were safe from the malice of the mob who found all efforts to invade the humble sanctum unavailing. They at last hit upon a capital plan to answer their purpose. Before the meeting hour they contrived to place one of their

number in the barn, who, the better to conceal himself, was put into a sack. The unsuspecting Methodists, having assembled as usual, they fastened the door and commenced their devotions. By and by the mob expected their accomplice to open the door from the inside and let them in ; but a change had come over him. Charmed by the spirited, soul-stirring singing of the little flock, he could not find heart to disturb them. Then they began to pray, and he began to tremble, and then to roar out for mercy, "and not having power to get out of the sack, lay bawling and screaming." Astonished, no doubt, at the unwonted sound, they finally mustered up courage to let the culprit out of the bag, who from that hour was a changed man.

And now, all over the country, there arose Methodist houses of prayer. In London, the "vast, uncouth heap of ruins, the Foundery," was rebuilt. In Bristol a piece of land was secured, and a "room" was erected large enough to accommodate the two societies which then flourished there. It was not a church nor a chapel, but simply a room where the members and their friends might meet altogether "at such times as the Scriptures were expounded." Wesley had no intention of assuming the superintendence, nor of taking upon himself the cost of this room ; and it was only at the earnest solicitation of his friends that he became proprietor of it. The example was followed in other places, and the rising power of Methodism was seen in the numerous buildings appropriated to its service. There was

early evidenced that liberality and love for the cause which still distinguish this part of the Christian Church. Of course amongst so poor a people there must have been great self-denial to accomplish so much in such little time. When about to build they would say, "Let us begin as if the king was to pay for it. It was then agreed that every member should pay one penny per week at least, and others what they thought proper. There was also a weekly collection towards the building, and the people were of one heart and soul. As there was a great reformation from swearing, drunkenness, and Sabbath breaking, the money that built the preaching house was saved out of the ale-houses, and many uncomfortable families were made truly happy." Such is the account given of the building of a chapel in one place. In raising a chapel at Barnard Castle, "the men at the close of their daily business laboured diligently in digging out stone for the Lord's house; whilst the women, amidst many reproachful sneers from the bystanders, assisted by bringing water to slake the lime. Matthew Justice eminently distinguished himself by his activity and zeal in the erection of the new chapel. In addition to a liberal subscription, he contributed greatly by his personal labour; scarcely allowing himself time for his regular meals, he was wont at noonday to repair to the demesnes, which were about 40 yards distant, there to partake of the crust of bread, or any other refreshment he might have carried with him, as though he had adopted a reso-

lution like that of the Psalmist, to give no sleep to his eyelids till he had found out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob.”*

As these rooms increased in number and pretension, it became customary for Wesley to open them. The profound veneration in which he was held was seen by this; for they desired no better consecration than a religious service at which he should officiate. Nor is there, he is careful to inform us, any other consecration allowed in the Churches of the Establishment “than the performance of public worship therein.” So strong and general was the desire to have the chapels opened by Wesley, that we find him preaching at Whitby, “in the new house, thoroughly filled above and below, though it contains twice as many as the old one, and although the unfinished galleries, having as yet no fronts, were frightful to look upon.”

These events denote a large amount of success; indeed, their numbers were rapidly augmenting. In 1767, when the first regular account of the numbers in society was published, there were 104 preachers, and 25,911 members of the society. Five years after there were 204 preachers, while the members had more than doubled in number.

We have thus briefly traced the manner in which Methodism arose; how societies were formed, preachers employed, and chapels built. However much Mr. Wesley might desire things to rest at this point, it was impossible that they should do so. It

* Steel’s Methodism in Barnard Castle.

was all very well to recommend the members to go to church, and live at peace with all men ; but that was not an easy matter. The clergy of Bristol refused to administer the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper to the colliers of Kingswood, and their conduct was imitated in other parts of the country. It must be confessed that while the Methodists did refrain from all abuse of the clergy, yet their very presence in any place was equivalent to a condemnation of their conduct ; and one may easily understand the indignation of the scholarly rector who found a part of his parishioners running after some preaching tailor or shoemaker. Remembering the weakness of human nature, we should therefore not wonder that the clergy were frequently heard to declaim against them. Nor should we, on the other hand, be surprised that the Methodists found their position by no means a pleasant one. It is evident there could not be much comfort at church for the poor people who, Sunday after Sunday, heard the minister of the parish preach against “ the hairbrained itinerant enthusiasts.” The result was what might have been expected ; the Methodists began gradually to stay away from church, and confine themselves to their own chapels—for the greater part of the members had none of Wesley's scruples about the Established Church. They had been converted under the ministry of the Methodists, who had gone to seek them when no man cared for their soul, and they may be excused for regarding them as the worthiest of God's servants. Wesley struggled as long as he

durst against what was inevitable ; and we are glad that it was so, because it shows more clearly that God was architect of the edifice. The United Society grew into a veritable church, which waged an unceasing warfare against wickedness, not only in Great Britain, but in Ireland, the West India Islands, and America, and waged it, too, with such success, as to warrant us in designating her the most Apostolic Church of modern days.

It is not our intention to explain the constitution of Wesleyan Methodism. The principal object of these pages is to show why and how Methodism arose ; and as the artist who wishes to describe an event in which many characters took part, gives prominence to the chief actors, and places that in the foreground which he desires most to be observed, leaving behind convenient shade the less interesting episodes, so we have left out much that is worth knowing, but for which we cannot find space in our confined canvas. If you would have full details, behold ! are they not written in the books of Jackson, and Smith, and Stevens ?

We may, however, note a few things which, under the divine blessing, apparently conduced to the success of the movement. And in the first place we may refer to the character of the pioneers of the movement. It must be considered a very fortunate thing—nay, more a providential thing—that they were clergymen of high talents and irreproachable life. There was surely never a more estimable minister of the gospel than George Whitfield, whose

heart was full of tenderness, whose tears fell like rain for perishing sinners, and whose voice was the trumpet that startled the wicked and the careless from their lethargy. The most eloquent preacher of the day, his words sent a thrill to the hearts of the poor, while they charmed the ears of the wealthy and the proud. His was that gentle boldness, that straight-forward simplicity of conduct which, while they offended some who would almost rather perish than be saved out of the ordinary way, yet led to actions, unpremeditated it is true, but immense in their results. It is certain that Wesley would not so soon have commenced field preaching had he not been pressed thereto by the impulsive Whitfield. We should not indeed be far wrong in dating the history of the Methodist Church from the day when, "thinking it might be doing the service of his Creator, who had a mountain for his pulpit and the heavens for his sounding-board, and who, when his gospel was refused by the Jews, sent his servants into the highways and hedges," Whitfield upon Hannam Mount addressed a company of Kingswood colliers, till their hard hearts melted, and the tears traced their way in channels of white down their blackened faces. But he had no faculty for organisation. He would, as Southey says, have been a saint in the Roman Catholic Church, but Wesley founder of an order. Hence it is that while his memory is blessed, the fruits of his labours are less apparent now than in his own day; the stream seems to narrow rather than widen. Nevertheless,

no one can tell how much his flaming words helped to spread the fire of revival, and to increase the numbers of those who ultimately joined hand and heart with Wesley. He was truly a great man, whose bones deserve better treatment than to be rattled up to the gaze of every curious lounger, in the far distant land where he closed his remarkable career. In his life was seen, well exemplified, the fact that true religion is ever philanthropic ; and Cowper's words did not convey too high a praise when he said :—

“ He loved the world that hated him ; the tear
That dropp'd upon his Bible was sincere.
Assailed by scandal and the tongue of strife,
His only answer was a blameless life ;
And he that forged, and he that threw the dart,
Had each a brother's interest in his heart.”

The great influence of song upon the human heart has often been spoken of. Everywhere, in every age, he who could seize upon any sentiment that was dear to the people, and could clothe it in poetry, and tune it to song, has gained a great influence for evil or good. Tyrants may tremble when a patriotic song is raised ; for its notes send a thrill of emotion to down-trodden men, and nerve them to dare and to suffer. In distant lands, strong men will weep when they hear some well-known song of home ; and the reason is, that it touches the heart, and that which rules the heart rules the world. Charles Wesley, in his hymns, reached the depths of the Methodist heart. They were no dry rhymes

with the doctrines “lying in cold abstraction.” There was a directness of appeal in them which went like barbed arrows to the heart, and fastened themselves with deep impression there. They expressed in forcible language every shade of Christian experience, describing exactly the state of the heart, and putting its sentiments in glowing words. From the day when “burdened, and sick, and faint,” he sought and obtained the favour of God, to the end of his life, the Methodist found a blessing in these hymns. If his faith grew dim, and he lost the witness of the Spirit, he came to God with a verse from his favourite collection:—

“Father, if I may call Thee so,
Regard my fearful heart’s desire;
Remove this load of guilty woe,
Nor let me in my sins expire!”

If in the battle of life he found his enemies numerous and watchful, then he had

“A shield should quell their rage,
And drive the alien armies back.”

In seasons of spiritual delight and communion with God, versifying and re-applying Milton’s noble passage, he could sing—

“With Thee conversing, we forget
All time, and toil, and care :
Labour is rest, and pain is sweet,
If Thou, my God, art here.”

In sickness, these hymns, joined with the sacred writings, of which they are frequently but a paraphrase, helped to cheer and comfort him. And

when, at last, the shades of eternity were closing around him, when earth could no longer offer either favour or enmity, the poor despised Methodist repeated some well-known verse with holy rapture, making it at once his prayer and praise, and final shout of victory. But it is not for his poetry alone that we are grateful to Charles Wesley. He was a true minister of the gospel, and shared with his brother in much of the toil and contumely that was showered upon the Methodists; nevertheless, he would never have established the Methodist Church. It is to John Wesley, more than to any other man, that we are indebted for the perpetuation of the blessings of this movement.

In the beginning, Whitfield's voice was the powerful trumpet to call the people together. Charles Wesley, gifted with divine poetry, was their sweet singer. John Wesley had the mind to legislate, and to lay hold of everything that could strengthen the building. Says Southey, "No founder of a sect or order, no legislator ever understood the art of preserving his authority more perfectly than Wesley." Lord Macaulay says that "his eloquence and logical acuteness might have made him eminent in literature; his genius for government was not inferior to that of Richelieu." With these great powers he possessed the rare art of pleasing in conversation. "Wesley," said Johnson, Prince of Talkers, "can talk well on any subject." Learned, acute, powerful in argument, he loved all knowledge that tends to enlarge our idea of the Almighty mind. He was punctual in all his engagements,

and would leave the best company when the time came. This led Dr. Johnson to say he was always in a hurry. "He is never at leisure," said he; "he is always obliged to go at a certain hour. This is very disagreeable to a man who loves to fold his legs and have his talk out, as I do." His preaching was clear and impressive, and at times his voice could scarcely be heard above the shouts of believers and the cries of penitents. To these powers he joined the graces of the heart. Of unbounded generosity, his charity went out towards all who were in sickness or poverty. It is the glory of a minister to be familiar with the abodes of wretchedness. Wesley was well known there.

"With pensive ears he heard the aged moan,
And saw their tears, and mixed them with his own ;
Then stretched his liberal hand, and shared his
frugal store,
And gave them all he could, and wished to give
them more."

However much his income increased, his temperance remained the same. When he had but £30 a-year he lived upon £28, and gave the rest away. When he had £120 a-year, he lived upon the same, and still gave away the remainder; and so, during his life, he gave away tens of thousands. And when his career was drawing to a close, he could truly sing:—

"No foot of land do I possess,
No cottage in this wilderness—
A poor wayfaring man;
I lodge awhile in tents below,
Or gladly wander to and fro,
Till I my Canaan gain."

We may take it as evidence of the purity of his motives, that while his tastes were of a refined nature, and that, had he yielded to his own predilections he would have taken no part in busy life, but in the society of learned men and congenial authors quietly communed his life away, he yet gave up all for the good of his fellow-creatures. For while he is yet at college, and wandering on the dark mountains of self-justification, he writes to his mother that he has been wishful to make a show in language and philosophy, but he finds them absorb too much of his time. If he cannot attain to any progress in them without throwing up all thoughts of his highest duties, why, farewell to them. And so, with yearnings for quiet and study, he goes resolutely into the battle-field, where souls are the prizes, and continues his congenial studies on horseback or where he may.

Such was the man “ who devoted all his powers, in defiance of obloquy and derision, to what he sincerely considered as the highest good of his species.” He stamped his own image upon the societies he formed, and having undisputed government of them, he strove to imbue preachers and people with the principles of his own noble nature. We have said he was charitable. This lovely trait in his character was not without great effect on the operations of the Methodists, especially in the commencement of their labours. The weather, in 1740, was very severe, and, in consequence, many people were unable to work, and having no assistance from the

parish, were suffering greatly. Wesley made a collection on Monday, another on Thursday, and again on Sunday, which enabled them to feed a hundred, sometimes a hundred and fifty a-day, of the most needy. In November, we find them distributing amongst the poor of their society the cast-off clothes which many who could spare had brought for that purpose. Indeed, the welfare of the poor seems at this time to have been the subject of frequent conference, and in Mr. Wesley's journal, under the date Nov. 25, 1740, we read, "After several methods proposed for employing those who were out of business, we determined to make a trial of one which several of our brethren recommended to us. Our aim was, with as little expense as possible, to keep them from want and from idleness; in order to which we took twelve of the poorest and a teacher into the society-room, where they were employed for four months, till spring time came on, in carding and spinning of cotton; and the design answered—they were employed and maintained with very little more than the produce of their own labour." Some time after, Mr. Wesley says, "I reminded the United Society that many of our brethren and sisters had not needful food; many were destitute of convenient clothing; many were out of business, and that without their own fault, and many sick and ready to perish; that I had done what in me lay to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to employ the poor, and to visit the sick; but was not, alone,

sufficient for these things; and therefore desired all whose hearts were as my heart—1st, To bring what clothes each could spare; 2nd, To give weekly a penny, or what they could afford, for the relief of the poor and the sick.” His design was to employ the women in knitting, to pay them a fair price for their work, and then add what more they needed. Twelve district visitors were appointed, who were to go round amongst the poor and sick every other day, and meet on Tuesdays, to give an account.

Indeed, their labours partook largely of a charitable character. They established schools for poor children; they took houses and fit them up to receive people who could not support a house themselves; they raised a fund to assist members whose business affairs were deranged, and they also made efforts to supply medicine and necessaries to sick people. To this end, they had erected adjoining the Foundery a spacious room in which “was a large electrifying machine, which was used on two days every week in the cases of afflicted people who resorted thither for relief.”

The money they subscribed weekly for the poor in the classes must have amounted to a very large sum. They were often very liberal indeed, as may be seen by what Wesley remarks of one place he came to. “In the class paper (which gives an account of the contribution for the poor) I observed one gave eightpence, often tenpence a week; another thirteen, fifteen, or sixteenpence; another sometimes one, sometimes two shillings. I asked Micah

Elmoor, the leader, (an Israelite indeed, who now rests from his labour) how is this, are you the richest Society in England ? He answered, I suppose not ; but all of us who are single persons have agreed together, to give both ourselves and all we have to God ; and we do it gladly, whereby we are able from time to time, to entertain all strangers that come to Tetney, who often have no friend to give them a lodging." Here we have a case in which the humble Methodist imitated the extinct monk in his best quality, welcoming the poor vagrant, and entertaining him ; not with the cold charity of supercilious poor law officials, but with the kind-heartedness of men who did it for the love of Christ.

The care with which Wesley watched over the Societies must also have greatly tended to purify and to strengthen them. Exact in the discipline of his own life, he looked for the same thing in every preacher and member. To this end, he made regular visitations of the classes, inquiring into the spiritual and moral state of everyone. He would allow of no wrong thing, and with relentless determination cut off from the society all whose conduct lowered the character of a Methodist. He warned the preachers against rich and lazy members, who would dissuade them from out-door preaching. " Go into the most public places on Sundays, lest you rest on your lees," said he. " Let there be no mean tricks, no cheating, in business. The Methodist knave is the worst of knaves." The preachers were requested to be industrious, serious, and

charitable. They were to speak evil of none, but to frankly tell every one of any evil that they observed in him. They were "not to affect the gentleman, having no more to do with that character than a dancing-master." They were not to be ashamed of anything but sin, not even of "fetching wood, if time permit, or drawing water, nor of cleaning your own shoes, or your neighbours." They were all to do everything at the proper time, and never to forget that their duty was "not to mend our rules, but keep them." The preachers in their turn were to be watchful over the members and enforce the strictest discipline amongst them. The Superintendent, or Assistant, as he was then called, had almost despotic power. It was for him to say who should preach, or who should not ; he had power to appoint and to dismiss the leaders, and of his own authority he could exclude members from the society. Nor was it likely that Wesley, to whom appeal could be made, would often reverse the acts of his assistants, for he loved good government, not caring so much for large numbers, as for the character of the members. In visiting the classes he was often compelled to cross thirty or forty names at once out of the books, and he would have crossed every name out rather than have an inconsistent member. In his Journal, Wesley supplies us with the motives and reasons of 76 persons who left the Society in Newcastle within a few months, and the way in which the statement is made proves how close were his examinations. We find

that amongst those who had retired from the Society some had left because, unless they did so their ministers (chiefly Dissenters) would not give them Sacrament. Some because their husbands, or wives, or parents, or masters, were opposed to it. Some had left "because people said such very bad things of the Society." Others because they would not be laughed at, or because it was too far off, and one because "we were mere Church of England men." There were also sixty-four persons expelled the Society, twenty-nine of them for lightness and carelessness, two for cursing and swearing, two for sabbath-breaking, seventeen for drunkenness, two for retailing spirituous liquors, three for quarrelling and brawling, one for beating his wife, three for lying, four for evil-speaking, and one for idleness and laziness. Alas! if the knife were as freely used now, how very many would be cut off! Wesley's desire was to transform every Methodist into a loyal and well-behaved citizen, whose outward deportment should prove the inward grace. In his Journal, we are frequently meeting with instances of the good effect of his admonitions. He had an abhorrence of extravagance in dress. The Quakers, especially, fell under his condemnation for this, that while they affected such plainness of style, they yet wore the most expensive clothes. One was too strict to wear a shilling necklace, but not too strict to wear a four score guinea repeater. Another would not sin in wearing lace as edging round her cap, but she could see no harm in wearing a point, though it cost

twelve times as much. "In one kind of apron or handkerchief, she dares not lay out twelve shillings but in another sort lays out twenty pounds. They will not put on a scarlet or crimson stuff, but the richest velvet, so it be black or grave. They cannot bear purple, but make no scruple at all of being clothed in fine linen, yea, to such a degree, that the linen of the Quakers is grown almost into a proverb." It was a part of Methodist discipline that the members should avoid all finery of dress, and while not copying the Quakers in their practical failings, to imitate them in their theory. He could not believe in the sincerity of that man's religion, who, while the poor were starving, would dress himself extravagantly, for "the sinfulness of fine apparel lies chiefly in the expensiveness, in that it robs God and the poor." He therefore spoke strongly and frequently on this matter, and he gives a word of high praise to the Whitby Methodists for that he "did not see amongst them a ruffle or a fashionable cap, though many of them are in easy circumstances."

Nor would it be right to overlook the social character of the meetings which were established among them. There was certainly something calculated to make a deep impression in the watch-night service, when in the lonely hours of the silent night, the tumult of a busy and hostile world being hushed, they watched and prayed together. But it is the class-meeting that we must enter to find the vital part of the system. This meeting, peculiar to

Methodism, has been condemned by some whose opposition is to be attributed to prejudice alone. It is difficult, indeed, to imagine how any church can be said to live which confines its religious instruction to the Sabbath services. Pastoral visitation, of course, is valuable and necessary, but there is no reason why advantage should not be taken of a plan so simple and useful as class-meetings. Regular visitation, except at long intervals, is generally impossible, while a multitude of causes may arise to prevent the conversation being of that spiritual nature which is meet for the private converse of the pious. There is, however, no such objection against class-meetings. At a stated hour weekly, the members come together, prepared by previous prayer and reflection, to express the state of their minds, to confess their shortcomings, to tell of their trials, their conflicts, and their victories, and "together bear each other up." Nothing is more natural, nothing more simple, nothing more profitable, nothing more delightful, nor will any one who has seen the cloud pass from the brow of the distressed, or who has felt the solace of this communion, say a word against class-meetings. The good they have done—the consistency they have given to the Society—the comfort to the depressed—the joy to the faithful—who can tell? Much as we enjoy them, we can only faintly understand the feelings of the earliest members. We talk of our temptations and trials—for there are trials which no improvement of circumstance can take away—

but, in addition to the common conflict, one could tell of a parent's anger—another of losing his work because he had turned Methodist—one could show the scars on his face, received in his Gospel labours—they could all bear witness to the roughness of their newly-chosen path, and tears would stream down their cheeks as they sung—

“What troubles have we seen !
What conflicts have we past !
Fightings without and fears within,
Since we assembled last.”

The long life of Wesley helped greatly to establish the work beyond all fear of failure. The severe opposition from the world, instead of injuring the cause, only bound the members together by a closer tie; a people united and loving can never be overcome by outside railers. There were the visionary advocates of stillness; there were also great controversies about predestination; and during fifty years of Wesley's ministry, there was carried on against him a course of violent attacks by men who were good in other respects; but who forgot in their eager advocacy of their favourite doctrines the charity of true religion, so that his whole life through, like the Jews when raising the walls of Jerusalem, with one hand he built the Church, whilst in the other he held the pen of defence. So long as he lived, disunion could not reach any height; and it would have been most fatal in the commencement of the movement. He lived down all his detractors, and crowds assembled to admire his venerable age in the

same streets, where, many years before, he had been mobbed by angry opponents. And when he died—at the age of fourscore years and eight—it was as an ancient Patriarch, with his spiritual children around him, and praising God with his latest breath.

It is the privilege of great men to move in advance of their times. While they sleep peacefully after their toils, their works are approved and imitated by the world which persecuted them in life. It is a splendid tribute to Wesley and his co-workers, that a hundred years after they were hooted and pelted, all Protestants, and even high Church dignitaries think it no disgrace to stand and preach in the busy streets as they did years ago. The change is wonderful. If Wesley were here to see it, he would say, “Behold now is all the world turned Methodist.”

Then the confirmation which the triumphant death of many of their members gave to their principles must have been very encouraging. Believing that God would verily dwell with men and open direct intercourse with His own children, they looked for extraordinary manifestations of His presence in the hour of death. When about to pass away, those standing by would ask for a sign or a word that might assure them all was well. Nor was it often that there was any doubt about the future. They were happy, they were more, they were frequently favoured with such ecstatic visions that they forgot the agony of the solemn hour, and thought they already heard heaven’s music and saw

heaven's glory. Nay, even children were witnesses of the comfort which religion affords in the dying hour, and were heard to rejoice with their latest breath. These things being published in the journals, and referred to in their meetings, could not fail to cheer and encourage the members, for they might well be content with a faith that was equal to the most trying circumstances.

The Deed of Declaration helped greatly to weld all these elements of success, securing as it did the chapels to Conference, and the perpetuation of the tinerant system. This famous deed, which was made in 1784, and enrolled in His Majesty's High Court of Chancery, recites that "divers buildings, commonly called chapels," had been from time to time conveyed by John Wesley to certain persons, upon trust that he and his brother Charles, and such other persons as they should nominate, and after their decease, should be nominated by the Yearly Conference, "might therein preach God's Holy Word;" also, that "divers persons had conveyed many chapels in various parts of Great Britain upon like trusts." It further recites that this deed is made for the purpose of explaining the words "Yearly Conference of the people called Methodists, contained in all the said trust deeds, and to declare what persons are members of the said Conference and how the succession and identity thereof are to be continued," and all this for the purpose of preventing any "doubt or litigation with respect to the same." After explaining who had composed the

Conference up to that time, and what had been the business of their meetings, the deed recites the names of one hundred preachers, who shall constitute the Conference, and it prescribes the regulations to which they shall be subject, as well as the powers, procedure, and duration of their yearly meetings.

Conference was no new thing in Methodism; for the ministers would, no doubt, frequently discuss together how best to succeed in their labours. On the 5th of January, 1739, Whitfield "held a Conference at Islington, concerning many things of importance, with seven ministers of Jesus Christ, despised Methodists, whom God in his Providence brought together."

The first Wesleyan Conference was held in 1744, and attended by six clergymen and four lay preachers; the business referring almost entirely to spiritual matters; nor was there much importance to be attached to it, excepting as being the first. It was very many years before Conference became the important and imposing body it now is; indeed, a few days sufficed for the transaction of all its business. In the year 1763 it "had no money matters to settle; but after the preachers' characters were examined, and they were stationed for the next year, all the time was taken up in speaking upon spiritual subjects."

It would be difficult to over-estimate the value of the Deed of Declaration, since it fixed permanently and unmistakeably the governing power; and, in forbidding the appointment of a minister to any

chapel oftener than three years in succession, it allowed no opportunity of discontinuing that itinerant system which has tended so greatly to the success of the Wesleyan Methodist Church. The necessity of such a rule is plainly proved by the tendency, seen in the communities which have seceded from the Wesleyans, to prolong the residence of their preachers in one place—a change which will ultimately deprive them of what little Methodism yet remains among them.

Perhaps we live in times too near Wesley's to entertain sufficient reverence for his name—for veneration increases with the mist of years. We should respect everything with which he was connected. The places where he stood should be dear to us. Above all, the stern virtues which he practised should be welcome to us. His charity and self-devotion, his prayer and patience, should all be made examples for us. What a fame is his. He needs no marble statue, no towering monument. His name is revered wherever Englishmen have gone. The South Sea Islander meets the polite Briton on this ground, and says, here we are alike because we have both been benefitted by him. Time itself will not bound his fame.

One of the most illustrious writers of ancient Rome, in winding up a great poem, says: "And now I have finished a work, which neither fire, nor steel, nor the consuming teeth of time shall be able to destroy. Come when it will the day that shall have no power but over my body, and let it finish

the doubtful term of life ; yet in my better part, immortal I shall soar above the lofty mansions of the stars, nor shall my name ever cease to be in honour." Wesley was no boaster, or he might have said, "And now by the grace of God I have commenced a work which neither slander nor opposition of any kind shall be able to destroy. Come when it will, the day that shall arrest this round earth in its circling course, and let it finish the history of time with the dreadful crash of expiring nature; yet the glory of this work shall rise above the ruined worlds, and be remembered with joy through all the ages of Eternity."

It is, we think, to be regretted that there is not in Methodist Chapels a more general use of the liturgy of the Established Church. There is certainly a danger of the sermon taking more of the attention and thought of the congregations than it ought. That this acts very injuriously may be seen in this, that instead of saying they are going to chapel, we but too often hear the people say they are going to hear Mr. So and So preach ; indeed the tendency is to exalt the sermon above the worship. That a form of prayer would be of great service on Sunday mornings is the opinion of many ; nor could we do better than to quote the words of two of the greatest men of the Society, one dead, the other living. Writing to the late Rev. Joseph Entwistle, Adam Clarke said, "with respect to the introduction of the liturgy of the Church of England, this book I reverence next to the book of God. Next to the

Bible it has been the depository of the pure religion of Christ, and had it not been laid up there and established by Acts of Parliament, I fear religion would long ere this have been driven to the wilderness. Most devoutly do I wish, that wherever we have service in the forenoon of the Lord's day we may have the prayers read. This service contains that form of sound words to which in succeeding ages an appeal may be successfully made for the establishment of the truth professed by preceding generations. Had it not been, under God, for this blessed book, the liturgy of the British Church, I verily believe Methodism had never existed. I see plainly that where we read these prayers our congregations become better settled, better edified, and put further out of the reach of false doctrine. Introduce the church service in God's name; not in any abridgement, but in the genuine original." And judging from the following words of Dr. Waddy, he would fully endorse the views of Dr. Clarke, "Though I have often commenced service with a great deal of hesitancy and difficulty, scarcely knowing how to go on, yet the reading of that beautiful form of words, which I so greatly admire, has tended to constitute an admirable preparation for the sermon and the other services which were to follow, has raised me above the cares and anxieties of the world, and I have come out of the pulpit a very different man from the man I was when I entered it." If this is the experience of Dr. Waddy, would it not be the same with many, who harrassed

by the cares which are inseparable from busy life, find themselves unprepared for the solemn services of the Sanctuary ?

It must be a matter of high pleasure to a sincere Methodist to see that there is an evident tendency to revive Old Methodism, and that the name of the President of Conference, the Rev. Chas. Prest, is imperishably associated with the movement. The ministers of our own day have grasped the true idea of Methodism, that their duty is to seek that they may be saved, the multitudes who never attend any place of worship. When in every town there shall be, in addition to the regular ministers, a powerful auxiliary, in energetic and pious home missionaries ; we may expect to see an impetus given to the Methodist Church, which shall result in greater things than have yet been seen in her history

The number of Wesleyan Methodists in Great Britain and Ireland is 347,997. There is, perhaps, some reason to fear that all these are not so regular in their attendance at class as might be desired. There are always some who while they have donned the Christian's uniform, are yet holding parley with the enemy, and instead of trying to live as far above the world as possible, seem to make it their study how near they may tread by the precipice without falling over. To exclude from the church is always so painful a duty, that while we cannot approve, we can scarcely blame a little wilful blindness in the matter. It must be confessed that the numbers specified do not convey an accurate impression of

the state of the Society, although they do truthfully tell the number of people who are called Methodists, and who receive members' quarterly tickets.

There are amongst them a few who on account of sickness never attend class all the year round, to whom tickets are taken. There are others who do manage to get to class one evening in the quarter, and there are more who continue to pay a monthly visit, always taking care to go on prayer meeting nights. Of course many through sickness and family affairs are unable to attend regularly, but we must not be charged with unfairness if we profess to know ~~that~~ ^{that} a large proportion of the absentees are such from indifference. We need not say how far this is removed from the spirit of Methodism. Verily there is a lamentable declension in zeal if the present race be compared with the first race of Methodists, a declension which while we mourn, we find no difficulty in accounting for.

It was in the midst of national degeneracy and religious apathy that Methodism arose, having nothing in common with the times, and being at war with the spirit of the age. We have related how it pursued that war, how every where it proved that the word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword. No opposition could arrest its triumphant progress; no slander, no persecution, no trials could turn its apostles aside from their duty. They were men, with the courage of men, intensified and purified by the Spirit of God; and they held up a light in the midst of that crooked and perverse

generation, which no blast from hell could put out. The world raged while it feared; and as usual endeavoured to destroy by persecution that which it could not arrest by fair means. If the laws were tolerant and refused assistance, the power of prejudice was great, and the Methodists were made to feel that their religion must be held at the cost of their peace, their good name, and almost of their lives. Yet they did bravely, "stem the torrent of a downward age," and willingly bore the loss of all things that they might win Christ.

We may be sure that at that time there would not be much lukewarmness or hypocrisy; for who would expose himself to the world's contumely; to be hooted and pelted, and have his head broken, for a thing which he did not value highly and feel to be of the highest importance? No one surely. Every Methodist was one from real affection and choice; her preaching, her lovefeasts, her class meetings were necessary to his existence, and he would sooner have thought of missing his bed or his dinner than of missing the means of grace. Like David he was glad when they said let us go up to the house of the Lord, and like David he would rather his right hand should lose its cunning than that he should forget his beloved Zion. O they were a noble race; heroic men and women, whose memories are fragrant with holiness, of whom we speak with reverence, and to whose example we should look for our own guidance.

Nor are we without such now; blessed be God,

we know some whose hearts are warm with apostolic zeal, and whose characters are lovely as those of our departed saints; who are first at the side of the death-bed, and whose kindly voices are well known in the abodes of wretchedness. But it would be foolish to deny that prosperity has had its usual baneful effect even upon Methodism; and that it by no means follows, as once it did, that because a man is a Methodist he is superior in piety and zeal to his fellows.

It is not because of any inherent weakness in Methodism; it is, if we mistake not, destined to flash its light into the Millenial year; but it is the fault of human nature which has played us no worse a trick than it did the Christians of earlier days. Five out of the seven churches were departing from their original purity when John saw visions in Patmos. In after years when the simple and industrious monks had converted deserts into gardens, they too fell with riches. It is in a word the inevitable tendency of prosperity that we are called upon to combat.

How would we mend this; by any relaxation of discipline or alteration of rules? Certainly not. If there be one thing more evident than another it is that the Methodist system is good; fully and thoroughly good. In no place where it has been tried and faithfully worked has it failed. From England to America, from the civilized European to the rude Fijian or New Zealander, it has a hold upon man, unequalled perhaps by any other system,

for it is not founded on superstition, but has its roots deep in the understanding and feelings of the heart. It is everywhere flourishing, where it is active. Nor need it be answered that times are changed, for no change of circumstance can do away with the pure and simple worship of God. What we want is not change but zeal. We want to study more carefully the lives and characters of the first Methodists, and we may be assured of this, that there is nothing in the altered state of the times or anything else that will prevent the same wonderful success following the same wonderful industry.

Methodism means simply pure and undefiled religion. And this the world, which is frequently correct in its definitions, acknowledges by calling all those Methodists whose lives are more than ordinarily strict and godly. Its success is therefore bound up with the success of Christianity ; if the latter is but a fading flower, the former may well be content to decay ; but if Christianity must overcome every evil system and hold dominion over all the tribes of the earth, then Methodism shall still prosper, for it is its own child.

Let us, therefore, set our faces against all so called "improvements ;" let us hold fast our meetings in their integrity, and if we find that we have departed from the custom of our fathers, let us as far as practicable, return to the old system. The success of the past is sufficient encouragement for the future. They were men of deep, of earnest

prayer. When they prayed they expected a palpable answer, nor were they often disappointed. They took it as proof that God approved their petitions when they saw the iron nature of olden sinners melt into remorse, and heard them cry for mercy like drowning men for help. We are truly blessed with the example of such men. Whatever there was to touch their hearts there is to touch ours: the same world, the same hell, the same heaven, the same Saviour.

It should be a matter of great rejoicing, that however talented were the Methodist preachers of an earlier period, they could not possibly surpass the present race. Learning combined with eloquence and intellectual power may be seen in them to as great an extent as in the ministers of any other section of the church. That they are popular let the well-filled chapels declare; so much so indeed that if a clergyman be more than usually impressive and touching, the poor say of him "he is just like a Methodist preacher."

Oh, we have often thought, when on some national occasions we have seen assembled in the same building people of every religion and party,—what a blessing it would be if there were but one visible Church; if the unseen bond that unites so closely true Christians of every name and country were typified by an outward conformity, which should permit them to agree upon all secondary questions; to meet in the same temples; to sing the same hymns; and to pray in the same words. It would be a sound

that would thrill the soul with an unknown joy,—the voices of an united Christendom rising in one magnificent song of praise. Perhaps this is impossible, as we are at present constituted. Yet, so far as practicable, “ ‘tis a consummation devoutly to be wished.” That we are a separated body, called by our own name, meeting in our own Chapels, and governed by our own laws, is for us a glorious fact; not because we have desired it, but because it has been forced upon us. This is, we conceive, the glory of Methodism,—that we are not responsible for our apparent schism, but they alone who call us schismatics. The case being so, we can afford to walk in the beaten path of our fathers, and confidently abide the time when a juster feeling shall prevail. Perhaps we shall not wait long. We hail with pleasure the fraternal words of many distinguished Clergymen, who, understanding our position, sympathise with us, and rejoice in our success. All true Ministers of the Church of England may well do so; since, if our existence is a blot upon their history, it is also to them an honour that the founders of Methodism were their own predecessors.

Like all who hold a neutral position, we have had to suffer the shot of belligerents on either side. While many members of the Established Church regard us with a feeling that is anything but friendly, the dissenters, on the other hand, look on us with suspicion, because we cannot join them in their assaults on what they really believe to be the unfair privileges of State Churchism. In this po-

sition we have abundant reason to be grateful to the Governors of the Society for having steered an even course between the “rocks on either hand.” We have, indeed, cause to be satisfied with our policy.

For we respect all, who, like ourselves, are seeking to promote the spread of the pure Gospel of Peace, and on this ground we can meet them in friendly discussion, and in godly rivalry. Further than this we cannot go ; we dare not waste our time in political warfare ; we have no politics, indeed, save those which relate to the Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.



